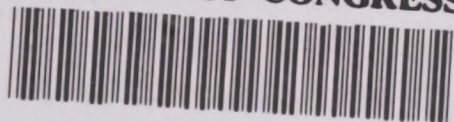


BOB'S HILL TRAILS



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THE BOB'S CAVE BOYS

THE BOB'S HILL BRAVES

THE BOY SCOUTS OF BOB'S HILL

THE RAVEN PATROL OF BOB'S HILL

THE TRAIL MAKERS

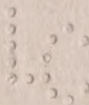
CAMP BOB'S HILL

BOB'S HILL TRAILS

BOB'S HILL TRAILS

BY

CHARLES PIERCE BURTON

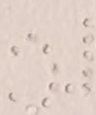
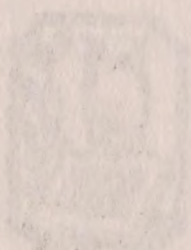


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TO THE FRIEND OF MY BOYHOOD
DR. HARRY B. HOLMES
THROUGHOUT WHOSE LIFE BOB'S HILL AND GREYLOCK
HAVE BEEN EVER-PRESENT REALITIES

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BOB'S HILL TRAILS

Bob's Hill Trails

CHAPTER I

THE SECRETARY COMES TO ORDER

"THE Secretary will come to order," said Skinny Miller, one Saturday, after the whole Band had crawled through the opening into the cave.

"You mean the meeting will, don't you?" I asked.

I am secretary, you know, or scribe, the Boy Scouts say. It means the same thing, anyhow, only we 'most always call it secretary. It sounds bigger.

When I said that, Skinny pulled out his hatchet and everlastingly shook it in the air. He couldn't swing it much, the roof of the cave being only a little above his head, where he was standing; but it was fierce, just the same.

"I said 'the Secretary will come to order.'"

"Order she is then," I told him. "Order is my middle name."

We didn't any of us know what he meant but we knew that he meant something. He always does. Skinny Miller knows what he is about, every day in the week. So we kept quiet and waited.

"Pedro," said he, "how long have you been secretary?"

Benny Wade spoke up before I could answer.

"Ever since before I was nine years old," he said, "and I am going on a hundred now. That is a long time."

"What we want to know, Pedro, is whether you have put down anything that ain't so, about the Band or the Boy Scouts, in the minutes of the meetin'?"

"If I did," I said, for I thought he was fooling, "I used invisible ink so folks couldn't read it."

"O, you did, did you? How about this then?"

He pulled a letter out of his pocket and handed it to me.

"I found it in our box at the postoffice, this morning. The Secretary will read the message."

Bill Wilson held up a lighted candle so that I could see. Here is what the letter said:

"Dear Skinny and the Band: — This is the first letter I ever wrote to you but I want to ask you a

question. I have read a lot about the doings of the Band and I want to know if all you say is true. It sounds to me, when I read about it, that it is all a fairy tale."

There was a lot more to it but just then I happened to turn the letter over and caught sight of something on the back of the paper that almost took my breath away. It was a circle, and in the center of the circle were a coffin and the figures 29 and 10. That is our Sign and nobody, not even our folks, has a right to use our Sign. If anyone in the Gingham Ground Gang should use our Sign and we found it out — well, there would be trouble, that's all I've got to say about it.

"Maybe the Secretary will explain," said Skinny, seeing that I had been struck dumb.

"Look here, Mr. President," I sputtered, "I don't know whether the guy that wrote this letter is a friend of yours or not but I'll put a head on anybody that uses our Sign, unless he belongs to the Band."

"Who's talking about Signs? What we want to know is about these fairy tales. The Secretary is to write the doings of the Band and not fairy tales."

"Fairy nothing!" I told him. "I'm a member of the Band, ain't I? I know what we do every vacation and Saturdays and nights after school, don't I? I can see what is going on, can't I, and write it down in the minutes of the meeting?"

"Guess what," said Benny. "Pedro can put it down, all right, but he doesn't have to bother with invisible ink, 'cause there can't anybody read his writing."

The boys all laughed at that. When anybody gets mad Benny tries to be funny, so he will get over it. But it didn't help me any. The more I thought of that fairy-tale business, the madder I got. At first I didn't think much about it, on account of seeing the Sign that way.

"I'll tell you one thing," I began, "and I don't care who knows it, —"

"Skinny — I mean, Mr. President," shouted Bill, before I could finish, "I move we all go in swimmin', so Pedro can cool off."

There was a great shout from the boys and without giving Skinny a chance to say that the meeting was adjourned, which he had to do to make it legal, there were eight heaps of clothes in the cave and the members of the Band were crawling and splash-

ing through the water, under Pulpit Rock, toward the pool below Peck's Falls.

But maybe you don't know what it is all about, unless you have read of the doings of the Band, and would like to hear who Skinny, Bill and the others are, where our cave is, and all that. Where our cave is, is a secret but it has to be in the minutes of the meeting. I can't help it, if somebody reads about it.

A lot of folks know about Bob's Hill, which begins a little back of our house, with only room for our garden between. Perhaps everybody doesn't call it Bob's Hill, like we boys do, but the hill is there, just the same. You would think so, I guess, if you had to climb it.

First comes Park street. It starts at the bridge which crosses Hoosic river, just beyond the railroad, and runs north. Then comes our house, with Phillips' house next south and Plunkett's big house beyond that. Blackinton's house is just north. Our barn is back from the street and over close to Blackinton's garden. Then comes our garden, with rows of apple trees and currant bushes around the edge, and a big hop vine climbing a pole in one sunny corner, near the house. At the back of our

garden is a stone wall, five or six feet high, to keep the hill from tumbling into the garden; then Bob's Hill, with orchards part way up from the bottom and a steep climb beyond the orchards, before you get to the top.

Climb it sometime on a run, if you don't think it is steep, digging the heels and soles of your shoes in at every step and your heart pounding like a trip-hammer, as I did once when we set the hill on fire — but I told about that long ago in the doings of the Band. Anyhow, Bob's Hill is no fairy tale but, when you get to the top, you are in fairy-land, just the same.

You can't see anything but the ground, going up, unless you stop to rest and turn around, because the hill is right in front of you and you have to lean toward it to climb. But pretty soon, when you come to the top and stand there to get your breath and cool off in the mountain breeze, you are in another world.

Bob's Hill isn't a hill at all, on the west side; anyhow, only a little one. It slopes down about fifty feet to a meadow, with Plunkett's woods on the south. The meadow, criss-crossed with stone walls, extends, almost level, for a mile back to the West

road. Just beyond that, old Greylock suddenly lifts his head high above everything and reaches out giant shoulders and arms clear across the state of Massachusetts — yes, even up into Vermont, for where we live it is only a few miles from the Vermont line.

Greylock is a mountain, as everybody knows who ever went to school, up in the northwest corner of Massachusetts. It is the highest point in the Berkshire Hills, which you may have heard about, and is the most wonderful place in the world to play, we boys think.

Just beyond the West road, in the edge of the first woods on the mountain-side, is our cave, with Peck's brook singing its way past the entrance, where we crawl in, careful not to get our feet wet unless we are barefooted. There, too, are Peck's Falls, tumbling from rock to rock, maybe seventy-five feet down, to the pool below, and Pulpit Rock, facing the falls like a great pulpit and forming almost a natural bridge, fifty feet above the brook.

To us boys Greylock seems alive — a big giant, like when Aladdin rubbed his lamp in *Arabian Nights*. He stands there and smiles down at us when the sun shines; plays with us; talks to us, and

sings sometimes with a great roar, when the wind blows through the Bellowspipe.

You can see all that and more except the falls part and cave, of course, from the top of Bob's Hill, looking west. Toward the east, it is different. Across a narrow valley is the Hoosac mountain range, not so high as the Greylock range, but high, just the same. Little Hoosic river flows north through the center of this valley, and then west to the Hudson, as you can see in the geography, and our village stretches across the valley and starts to climb the hills on each side.

There are eight of us boys, when we are all together — Skinny, Bill, Benny, Hank, Harry, Wally, Andy, and Pedro, which is myself, John Alexander Smith. Sometimes we are a band of Bandits; sometimes, a band of Indians; sometimes, Boy Scouts, and sometimes we get so mixed up we don't know what we are. Maybe Bill is an Injun; Skinny is Gory Gabe, the Bandit King — his real name is Gabriel but we call him Skinny, because he is so fat — and the others are Boy Scouts, all at the same time. It makes it hard for me, because I never know whether I am scribe or secretary, when I am telling about the doings.

Our Bandit name is "The Boys of Bob's Hill"; our Indian name, "The Bob's Hill Braves," and our Scout name, "Raven Patrol of Bob's Hill." Maybe you will believe we are something else before you get through reading this history, because big things happened which I am going to tell about. Whatever we are, Skinny Miller is leader and Bill Wilson, next, with Benny Wade not far behind, although he is younger.

As I was saying, there were eight heaps of clothes on the sandy floor of the cave, where nobody could tie knots in the sleeves, and eight boys were splashing their way under Pulpit Rock, where it arches across the brook, toward the pool under the Falls.

Bill's motion was for us to go swimming but that was what Mr. Norton, our scoutmaster, calls a figure of speech. Peck's brook isn't deep enough to swim in. In the deepest part you can stand with the water only up to your waist, maybe, and watch tiny trout nibble at your toes, after you have stood quiet long enough. Or you can stoop down, where the brook comes foaming and tumbling over some ledge, and let the water pour over your back. Say, that is a great way to cool off. It didn't take long to forget about being mad.

When we want to swim, we go over to the Basin, in Tophet brook, on the other side of the village, but that isn't much more than big enough to dive in.

It was great, standing there in the shady pool, and looking up at the top of the ledge. The water comes pouring down, playing hide-and-go-seek with the sunshine, until finally it tumbles into the pool, with a roar which can be heard as far as the West road, when the wind is right. The Falls made so much noise that we couldn't hear anything else, although we knew that there was a rustling and a whispering in the treetops and, maybe, crows were calling to each other, over beyond the woods.

"Great snakes!" shouted Bill, after we had played around there a while. "Put this in the minutes of the meetin', Pedro."

He opened his mouth and gave a yell that almost tore the moss from the rocks. It sounded as if a whole band of Indians had broken loose. Bill can make the most awful noises of anybody in our part of the country, or anywhere else, I guess.

"And don't you dast tell any fairy tales—" began Skinny; then stopped in surprise.

Louder than the falling water, frightened screams

came floating down from the woods above. Skinny looked at Bill and then at me. They were nearly paralyzed; it was easy to see that.

"Guess what," said Benny. "Maybe they are Pedro's fairies."

"It's worse than fairies," groaned Skinny. "It's girls; that's what it is, and we are a long way from our clothes. There must be a picnic or something."

"It's lucky I hollered when I did," Bill told us. "They would have been out on Pulpit Rock in another minute, and Skinny would have had a fit. Maybe they are peeking now."

We all crouched down in the water when Bill said that, with only our heads showing, expecting every minute to see them come to the edge and look down, or else make their way out on the ledge of Pulpit Rock, in plain sight. Not a sound could we hear except the noise of falling water.

"Maybe I'd better holler again," said Bill, after we had waited a while. He opened his mouth wide but still crouched there on his toes, with just his head showing above the water.

Skinny motioned to Benny and me, who were nearest, and we gave Bill a quick shove, which tipped him over in a hurry and sent his head under.

The yell had started but it died away in a gurgle and a lot of bubbles.

"Fellers," said Skinny, when Bill had come up again, spouting water and gasping for breath, "we can't stay here all day. Let's beat it to the cave, girls or no girls."

We crawled through the pool, with only our heads showing and without making a sound, but beyond the pool the water wasn't deep enough to duck. Then we had to stand up and run as fast as we could, which was not very fast on account of the rocks. At last we came to the opening, without having seen any of the picnickers, and crawled into the cave, one after another.

"Harry," said Skinny, after we had dressed, "suppose you sneak up and find out where they are. Don't let them see you, because they mustn't know about the cave. Maybe we can happen around and get some ice cream or something."

Harry crawled out and made his way up the side of the ravine. A few minutes later he came back again.

"Whoever they were, they have gone," he told us.

That evening, at the postoffice, Skinny nudged me and grinned. We were passing a group of girls,

who were waiting for their mail. One of them was telling about going on a picnic up to the "Glen" and being frightened away by the "terrible screeching of some wild animal." It made Bill feel proud when he heard about it.

CHAPTER II

RAVEN PATROL HEARS BAD NEWS

ONE morning, not long after the things happened that I have been telling about, Benny Wade came running into our yard. He was excited over something. Benny lives across the street from our house, only a little farther north.

I was hoeing in the garden and didn't see him until he whistled. My father had promised me ten cents an hour for working in the garden. That was just the price of an ice cream soda, and an ice cream soda tastes fine, after an hour's work in the hot sun.

"Working, Pedro?" asked Benny, coming to the fence and looking over.

"Nope," I told him. "I'm playing leapfrog with this hop vine."

"Leap out in front," he said. "I want to show you something."

"I'll go out and look at it for a second," I told him, "but I've got to come back and finish my hour. It's 'most up."

I was just as excited as Benny was, when he showed it to me. What I saw was a big arrow drawn with chalk on the sidewalk, pointing up the street, and under the arrow was a picture of a crow. It looked some like a crow, anyhow. That meant for Raven Patrol to follow the trail wherever it might lead, even to the ends of the earth.

"An arrow in front of our house points over here," said he. "Come on. There is something doing. I don't know what, but something."

"They told me to work an hour," I said, "and besides there is an ice cream soda in it. I'll tell you what; help me for a half hour longer. That ought to be good for another soda, one for each of us. The trail will keep half an hour."

Benny grabbed a hoe and pitched in so hard it made the sparks fly every time he hit a stone, which was often. Pretty soon Mother looked out of the kitchen window and saw us.

"O, boys," she called. "Come here a minute. I need help."

Benny and I looked at each other in despair, thinking that maybe the woodbox was empty, but we went, just the same. When my mother says to do a thing, you have to do it.

"I am frying doughnuts," she smiled at Benny. "I don't see how it happened but I find that I have four too many. I thought maybe you boys could tell me some way to get rid of them."

"Leave it to us," we shouted.

The hoeing seemed to go easier after that and soon we were ready to follow the trail. We started on a run toward the bridge, for the arrow pointed that way. Beyond the bridge, in front of the post-office, we found another arrow, and a little farther on, where the street turns to go to Skinny's house, was another. Then, when we found an arrow in front of the gate, pointing toward Skinny's barn, we knew what to do.

Not a boy was in sight anywhere but on the side of the barn, as big as life, was our Bandit Sign. There was a circle and in the center, a coffin. Above the coffin was a figure 6 and below, 10. Nobody knew what that meant but us. We knew, all right.

"Meet at the cave," it said, "on the 6th day of the month, at the 10th hour."

"We'll have to hurry," whispered Benny. "This is the 6th and it is half past nine now. The others must have gone."

We had turned to start, when a lasso fell across

my shoulders and tightened, and, with a great shouting, the Band came tearing out of the barn after us.

"Betcher life, a rope's the thing," said Skinny, loosening the knot. "You never know when you will need it."

"We've just time to get to the cave," he went on, "unless Pedro's mother is making doughnuts. If she is, maybe we'd better meet there."

I nudged Benny to keep quiet about the doughnuts. It seemed best. She only had "four too many."

We went down the track as far as the first road going west, and turned there. Pretty soon we came to a lane and hurried up that lane into Plunkett's woods. From there we made a bee-line to the cave, through the woods and across the fields.

From the West road a mountain trail winds part way up Greylock, until it peters out somewhere and runs up a tree. We followed that trail, until we were opposite Peck's Falls and were starting to turn into the woods, with a whoop, when Skinny stopped us.

"Hist!" said he, dropping behind a tree. "Have you forgotten how we were attacked, that time?"

"Great snakes!" exclaimed Bill. "I 'most forgot Pedro's fairies. It was awful, too."

We crawled through the woods, keeping behind trees and bushes and making no more noise than we could help, the roar of the falls growing louder.

There was nobody in sight, girl or anything else, so we stopped at Pulpit Rock a minute, as we 'most always do. Skinny edged his way out on a narrow shelf-like ledge, until he was about half-way across. In front of him were the falls, pouring down into the pool. Back of him was a wall of rock, maybe five or six feet high and a foot or two thick, sort of hollowed out on top. That was the pulpit part, which you can see for yourself by going there.

Motioning for us not to make any noise, Skinny put his hands on the pulpit and drew himself up, until he could see over and down into the ravine, far below. From there, he could see the place where the cave was, with a big tree seeming to be growing out of the top of it. Then he carefully let himself down to the ledge and edged his way back along the narrow shelf again. You have to be careful, for it would kill anybody to fall off.

"The coast is clear, men," said he. "Forward, and mum's the word."

It didn't take long to find out what the meeting was for, when we once were inside the cave.

"Something terrible has happened," exclaimed Skinny. "Tell them about it, Bill."

"Mr. Norton has got to go away," began Bill. "He has to go out to Chicago to spend several months, maybe a whole year."

Say! You could have knocked me down with a feather when Bill said that. It paralyzed us. Nothing would be the same without Mr. Norton. Harry was the first to speak.

"It will 'most break up the patrol," he groaned. "We can't get along without Mr. Norton."

We all felt the same and I saw Skinny sort of fingering his rope but not saying a word.

"How soon does he have to go?" somebody asked.

"About the first of October."

"Anyhow," said Skinny, "we've got all summer to have fun in and something may happen in that time."

We hung around the cave quite a while after that, talking about Mr. Norton's going away and trying to think of some scheme to keep him from going, but it wasn't any use.

"Fellers," said Skinny, finally, "we've got to do something before he goes and do something big. Pedro, think of something; you are secretary."

"I'm secretary, all right," I grumbled, "but that ain't what secretaries are for. They are to write up the minutes of the meeting."

Skinny pounded the sides of the cave with his hatchet, until the sparks flew like everything.

"A secretary is to do all the business of the Band," he said. "I read it in a book."

"Well," I began, trying to think of something, "there's that ball game with the Gingham Ground Gang — I mean the Eagles. I saw Tom Chapin's mother and she said he was coming home for a two weeks' vacation. We'll need him to catch for us."

Tom Chapin was captain of the Band at the start, until he went away to school. He was the one who found the cave. We still call him a member of the Band but not of Raven Patrol.

"That is something," said Skinny. "We must play that game, fellers, before Mr. Norton goes. He will want to see it. But we've got to do more than that. We've got to have all kinds of fun, more than we ever had before."

"Nobody could ever have as much fun as we do,"

said Harry. "Do you remember that time we were lost on Greylock? No fun, then. Oh, no!"

"I guess you haven't forgotten when we set Bob's Hill on fire," I told them. "I couldn't forget that in a thousand years. It was fun afterwards but wasn't so much fun while it was going on. I was scared half to death."

"Do you remember when we hiked over Florida mountain?" said Benny.

"And the time we pretty near drowned right here in the cave?" said Bill. "I guess we should have drowned if it hadn't been for Tom Chapin. Great snakes! That was some time, all right."

"Don't you remember when we licked the Gingham Ground Gang?" said Andy. "That was before we began to be friends. We wouldn't do it now, of course."

"But we could, just the same, only we don't want to," put in Bill.

"Betcher life!" said Skinny. "And I remember when I lassoed that bear, just like yesterday. Gee, he was mad. I'll bet I'd 'a' lassoed that lion, out in Indiana, if I'd had my rope along."

"Huh!" Bill told him. "That was only a moving-picture lion, without any teeth."

"He had claws, just the same. I noticed that you were scared, all right."

"That was a lot of fun," Bill went on, willing to change the subject, "when I 'most got killed at Natural Bridge, in North Adams."

"And when we made the spanking machine and everlastingly pounded Bill," laughed Hank.

"I guess we have done everything there is to be done," mourned Skinny. "There ain't anything left to do. Maybe we'd better begin and do the things all over again."

"Nixy on the spanking machine," Bill told him. "I won't stand for that again."

It made me feel bad to have Skinny say there wasn't anything left to do, for what Skinny can't think of isn't worth doing anyhow, and I told him so.

"I can't think up something, all in a minute," he said. "Of course, we can go swimming and fishing and have campfires with Mr. Norton, and things like that. We'll do those things, anyhow. But this must be something big. I'll tell you what: let's ask Mr. Norton. He 'most always can think of something."

CHAPTER III

CAMPFIRE ON TOPHET BROOK

UNLESS you have read the doings of Raven Patrol, you may not know about Mr. Norton. He is our scoutmaster, and they don't make them any better. Our folks would rather have us with Mr. Norton than at home, because we always learn so much when we are with him.

"John," said my father, one day. The folks call me John, or John Alexander when they are mad, but the fellows call me Pedro. "John, what kind of a man are you going to be, when you grow up?"

"Assuming," put in Mother, "that he does grow up. My stars! I don't see how boys can get into so many scrapes and live."

"I think I'll be like you, Dad," I told him.

"Don't you do it," he said, "but if you will pattern after that scoutmaster of yours, your mother and I will be very proud."

We didn't know how to get along without Mr. Norton. It almost would be like losing Skinny or

Bill. He is the one who got us to join the Boy Scouts, made our Band into Raven Patrol, taught us all the Scout stunts — how to take care of ourselves when we are lost, and things like that.

Mr. Norton is also the one who took hold of the Gingham Ground Gang, one time after we had been fighting, and formed them into another patrol, called the Eagles. Then the Summer Street Gang sent us a notice not to go swimming in the Basin any more, because it was in their part of the town. Of course, we went just the same. It would take more than that gang to stop us, I guess, in a fair fight but they jumped on us one day when they were two to our one and drove us off. Then, what did Mr. Norton do but make Tiger Patrol out of them !

We like it and we don't like it. Bill Wilson shakes his head about it sometimes.

"There soon won't be anybody left to fight, if this thing keeps on," he said, one day, "unless we fight each other. I've a good notion to lick Skinny right now, just for practice. I've got it in for him, anyhow."

"Lick nothin' !" Skinny told him. He stooped, picked up a chip and balanced it on one shoulder. "Maybe you dast knock that off," said he.

Bill would have done it, too, and then there would have been an awful fight, if Benny hadn't crept up and poked the chip off with a long pole. When Skinny came back from chasing Benny, he had forgotten all about Bill.

It was Mr. Norton, too, who took us to Indiana one summer, where we camped out near some lakes. And he went with us to Boston and on a lot of hikes, and was scared half to death when we were caught in a storm on East mountain and had to stay all night, although it didn't hurt us a bit. He thought we were lost but we knew where we were, all the time.

So when Skinny said, "Let's ask Mr. Norton," we knew that it was the thing to do. We went up to his house right after supper, and found him out in the back yard. He didn't see us at first.

"Everybody caw," whispered Skinny. "Loud!"

Say! He saw us then and heard us, too. So did the neighbors. They came running out to see what had broken loose, and then went back mad. Some folks seem to think a boy can keep still all the time.

But Mr. Norton wasn't mad. He yelled, "Caw," back at us, as loud as anybody except Bill, and hurried out in front.

"This is fine, fellows," he said, his face beaming—"a great pleasure and a great honor. I knew that my garden needed hoeing but I never for a minute thought you would come up here and do it. It won't take more than an hour, if we all pitch in and work hard. How did you happen to think about it?"

Skinny looked at Bill, kind of scared, and then at me, and I saw Harry scratching his head, as if he didn't know just what to do. We'd as soon hoe Mr. Norton's garden as any but you have to do something besides hoe garden, once in a while, I guess.

Bill nudged Skinny and Skinny gave me a kick on the shin, which meant for me to get busy and say something, being scribe. Just then I saw a twinkle in Mr. Norton's eyes.

"You are trying to fool us," I told him. "There isn't a weed in your garden. I'll bet you have just finished hoeing it."

He turned around and looked at it in surprise. "That is right," said he. "Now I wonder how that happened to slip my mind."

"We have come on important business," I added. "We want to talk over something."

He led the way to the shade of a big tree, for the

sun was not yet down, and threw himself on the grass, while we gathered around close, Benny closest of all.

“Go easy, now,” he said. “Break it to me gently. You must remember that I am not very strong. But, wait — before we begin I am going to ask one of the gentlemen from Park street, Mr. Benjamin Wade, to run into the house and tell them that the Champion Ice Cream Eaters of America have assembled, expectantly.”

“You see,” he explained, “Mrs. Norton made ice cream for supper and made so much she has been hoping somebody would come along and help get rid of it, before it melts.”

“Everybody caw,” yelled Bill, before Skinny could get a chance. Bill is assistant patrol leader and likes to work at it once in a while.

“On second thought, Benny,” said the scout-master, when the noise had stopped, “it will not be necessary for you to go. Here comes the lady now. She must have heard that you were here.”

“Maybe,” he went on, looking at me, “the business is too important to wait. If it is, I suppose the stuff will have to melt.”

“Oh, stop your foolishness,” said Mrs. Norton,

who had come up in time to hear what he was saying. "Give these boys a chance. I believe you are more of a boy than they are."

"I like ice cream just as well," he exclaimed, reaching for a spoon.

After that there wasn't much said for several minutes; but when the cream had been eaten and Bill had put away two dishes of it, we told about what we had heard, that our scoutmaster was going away; that we knew it would break up the patrol, and that we wanted to do something big before he went but couldn't think of anything big enough.

"We can't get along without you," said Skinny. "We'd just as soon think of getting along without Bill."

"I call that a real compliment," laughed Mr. Norton, "for Bill certainly is a regular fellow."

"I have tried to keep close to you boys," he went on, looking sober. "Fifteen years difference in our ages means more now than it will twenty years from now but we have been great pals, just the same. I have had a business offer from Chicago which I can not afford to turn down, although it will keep me there for a year or more. You would not ask me to, I am sure. You and I owe it to ourselves

and to the world, to make the very most we can of our abilities and our opportunities.

“That is what I call success—not to make money, although a reasonable amount is desirable—but to make the most of one’s self. I have been trying to do it, with your help. You have been trying to do it, I hope, with my help. As the years go on, we’ll keep on trying, and, maybe, some of these days you will pass me; but I am going to set you a hot pace and lead you a merry chase, and don’t you forget it.

“Even if I do go away, we’ll keep close to each other, just the same. Meanwhile, if I understand our patrol leader correctly, you wish me to go out in a blaze of glory, so to speak. You want to do something new and something big. You have asked me a hard one. If there is anything you boys haven’t done, I can not think of it at the present moment. Anyhow, I am willing to leave it to Skinny. He’ll think up something, never fear. I’d even be willing to leave it to Bill. Whatever else we may do, we surely must have a lot of campfires, for I have much to say to you. We haven’t had a campfire in a long time. Let’s have one right away. What do you say?”

"Where'll we have it?" asked Skinny.

"We could have it almost anywhere but there is a place, not far away, which I want you to see. Were you ever at what is called Bowen's Corners? It is on one of the hill roads, up toward East mountain."

I guess we had been nearly every other place, especially west of the village, but this was east and we hadn't been there, although we had hiked over the Hoosac range, farther north.

"Is it anywhere near the place I lassoed the bear, that time?" asked Skinny. "If it is, I'll take my rope along."

"No, that was farther south."

"What is up there?" asked Bill.

"Wait and see. The place is on Tophet brook, only a half mile or so above the Basin, if we follow the brook. It may be several miles by the road."

"Let's follow the brook," I said. "We have been up Peck's brook above the falls but never Tophet brook, although we often have talked about doing it."

"All right, if that suits you. We shall have to come back by the road, for it probably will be after dark. If Skinny will call a meeting for tomorrow

afternoon, about five o'clock, I think I can be ready by that time."

"How about eats?"

"You make a good commanding officer, Skinny, for you always look after the eating part. Suppose each one carries a lunch; then we can stop by the brook somewhere and have a picnic."

When the time came, we didn't need any Sign to tell us about it. We went down Summer street, until we came to some bars across a trail, which wound down from the mountain through a pasture. Then, when we reached a certain tree we turned and climbed down a steep path, along the side of a ravine, until we came out in front of a little pool of water, at the bottom.

The pool is about a rod long and almost as wide, held there in a scooped-out place in the rock, like a great bowl. Tophet brook comes fighting its way down among the rocks, at the bottom of a deep ravine with wooded sides, until a little above the pool it spreads out over a floor of stone, then pours over the edge into the pool, three or four feet below.

That pool is the Basin, where we go swimming. It is great there in summer time, for the sun strikes it only in the middle of the day. During the rest

of the time it is shady down there and the water, nice and cool.

The Basin looked good to us. Mr. Norton was ahead, leading the way and wondering, I guess, where he could step so as not to get his feet wet. Bill grabbed Skinny and turned him around; then held up two fingers for us to see, moving them back and forth slowly.

That meant, "Let's go swimming."

Mr. Norton didn't care, when we asked him about it. He sat down in a cool place and waited, where the water was pouring around the end of a stone, making a soft, gurgling music.

In less than half a minute there was a double splash, as Skinny and Bill jumped into the Basin; then came six other splashes, and for half an hour we forgot about everything else except that we were having all kinds of fun.

"Time's up, fellows," called Mr. Norton, finally. "Let's move on. I am beginning to feel hungry."

We were, too, only we hadn't thought about it; we had been too busy. There was a race to see who would get dressed first and soon we were climbing up the brook again, jumping from rock to rock, or going single file along the edge.

After a time we climbed up out of the woods and ravine into a shady meadow, and sat down under a tree to eat our lunch and have a campfire.

"Everybody scatter and bring wood," shouted Skinny, after we had eaten all we could stuff and had sprawled around a while.

"Don't build too big a fire," warned our scout-master, "just big enough to light up the shadows, when it grows dark, and make things cheerful. We do not exactly need a fire at this time of the year."

"What were you going to show us, Mr. Norton?" asked Benny, after we had sat around and talked a while.

He pointed to a house, which stood not far away, where two roads crossed.

"Huh ! That ain't much," said Skinny. "There are a lot better houses than that down in the village."

"Of course, it is worth coming for," he added, to be polite.

"No, the house isn't much to look at, as you say, but it is a very interesting place, just the same, because a great woman was born there. Her name was Susan B. Anthony. You boys may be too young to have heard much about her."

"I have," said Skinny. "She wanted to vote or something. I read it in a book."

"Yes," laughed Mr. Norton, "she wanted to vote or something. She grew up into a very strong and famous person—a big, brainy, brave woman, with a mission. She couldn't vote, herself, and she had no husband to vote for her; yet she had to pay taxes."

"What caused the American Revolution, Skinny? Maybe you read that in a book."

"Taxation without representation," recited Skinny. "The colonists fought like blazes. I had thirteen ancestors in the Battle of Bunker Hill, and one of them was killed. They waited until they could see the whites of the enemy's eyes and then —"

"Aw, cut it out," Bill told him. "This ain't any history lesson."

"Well, they did, anyhow," grumbled Skinny.

"Right," said Mr. Norton. "Go to the head of the class. As our learned patrol leader has informed us, the American colonists were obliged to pay taxes and they didn't have anything to say about it. If they had been represented in the British Parliament and in that way had voted taxes on themselves, they wouldn't have thought any-

thing about it, for the taxes were not burdensome, but they did not like to have money taken away from them without their consent.

“ Susan B. Anthony felt much the same way. She couldn't see why, just because she happened to be born a girl baby instead of a boy baby, she shouldn't have something to say about spending her own money, after growing up. It didn't seem just or right to her. So she started a movement for woman's suffrage, or helped to start it. She worked and wrote and talked for it, and devoted her life to what she considered a great and righteous cause, and at last it came about, although she didn't live to see it. The Susan B. Anthony amendment to the Constitution of the United States, giving women the right to vote, finally was adopted.

“ Boys, I am not going to discuss the question of whether woman suffrage is a good thing or not. Here is the point. Susan B. Anthony was born right over there in that house, and just because a certain baby came to live there, that house is now one of the historic landmarks of the Nation. Do you suppose, in after years, people will point to the house where one of you boys was born, and treasure it as an historic landmark ? ”

"Maybe they will our barn," I told him. "There have been big doings there."

"Why not? Wouldn't you go a long way to see the barn where George Washington played when he was a boy? It is hard for us now to think of such great men as having been boys like yourselves, playing in some barn, maybe. It is a wonderful and inspiring thing that boy and girl babies, who do not know anything at first, can grow into great men and women, who take this old world by the hair of the head, so to speak, and start it off in a new direction."

"It seems strange," he added after a moment, "that the early settlers of this country built their houses on the hills instead of in the valleys. Savoy, over there on the mountain, for instance, was a thriving settlement before there were any people living in the valley at all."

"Susan B. Anthony's father came here at an early day and built a small cotton mill, by the side of this little brook, high above the valley. He rigged up a waterwheel and ran the mill by water power. There wasn't any more than enough power to run the mill. One day, so the story goes, his wife came down to the brook to get a pail of water."

She dipped her pail into the little flume above the wheel, instead of the brook below it. Her husband pretended to be mad about it.

“What are you trying to do?” he exclaimed.

“Do you want to stop the mill?”

Talking in this way about many things, the evening passed quickly and it came time to start for home. We carefully put out the fire with water from the brook but there was no mill to stop. Then we went up to the house where Susan B. Anthony was born and started down the road, which led in a round-about way to the village.

“You asked me to tell you something big to do,” said Mr. Norton, when the time had come to say good night, “and I have just thought of something. I’ll go with you, if I can get away, but if I can’t I’ll be willing to trust you boys to go alone and maybe your folks will.”

“You have been up on Greylock, several times,” he explained, “and you have climbed down the west slope into the edge of the Hopper, but you never have been to Stony Ledge.”

“Where is that?” asked Bill.

“It is the peak just west of Greylock, on the other side of the Hopper. There is a wonderful

view from the top of a ledge, down into the Hopper. It is worth seeing, and as the trails have been pretty well marked we shouldn't have much trouble in finding it."

"Everybody who wants to go to Stony Ledge caw three times," shouted Skinny.

There was an awful racket for a minute, Bill Wilson making more noise than anybody.

CHAPTER IV

"ADVANCE AND GIVE THE COUNTERSIGN"

"JOHN ALEXANDER," said Father, one morning, "what are those chalk marks on the front of the house ? "

"I don't know," I told him. "I haven't been out yet. What kind of marks are they ? "

"Somebody has drawn a wobbly circle on the brick wall, and put something or other in the center of it. I am not sure whether it is a load of hay or a wheelbarrow."

"Are there some figures or anything like that ? "

"Come to think of it, I believe there are some figures. What is it ? Did you put it there ? "

"No, I didn't put it there," I hurried to tell him. "It wasn't there when I came in last night and I haven't been out this morning. Somebody is trying to be smart, I guess."

"If I find any boy marking up this house, I'll make him smart in several places at the same time," he went on.

"And I'll put a head on the first fellow I catch at it," I told him.

That seemed to satisfy him but I'd have hard work doing it, if it happened to be Skinny. Anyhow, you never can catch Skinny at anything.

I knew what it was, all right, or thought I did. That "load of hay" was a coffin, and the chalk was our Sign. There was going to be a meeting of the Band.

As soon as breakfast was over, I sneaked out and took a look at it. Sure enough, there was the Sign, as big as life. It said to meet at the cave at nine o'clock. But I couldn't tell the folks. The Sign is our secret, and what folks don't know doesn't hurt them any.

I had an hour's work in the garden to do, sign or no sign, and it was the longest hour I ever knew. It was almost nine when I finished. I was just scrambling over the wall, at the back of the garden, up into Blackinton's orchard, when I heard mother calling.

"John," said she; then, "John Alexander!"

When she put on the Alexander part, I knew it meant business.

"What do you want?" I yelled back.

“The woodbox is empty.”

Isn't that fierce? Every time a fellow starts to do something important that woodbox has to be empty.

“I'll be late,” I told her, before I thought. “The Sign said nine o'clock.”

“Late for what? What sign?”

“Nothing,” I explained. “Only I have a hunch that the Band is going to have a meeting or something.”

“I have a hunch, too,” she said. “If that woodbox isn't filled and heaped up inside of fifteen minutes, it is going to be a sign of bad luck.”

That is why the secretary was late at the meeting. I went up over the hill alone and hurried on through the fields to the West road, taking the short-cut from there to Pulpit Rock. You go up the mountain road only a little way; then turn in between two red houses. From there you walk along the edge of a ravine, until you come to a barbed-wire fence. That isn't the place, but, if you are not a girl, you can wriggle under the fence, without tearing your clothes, and come out into a path, which winds through the woods to Pulpit Rock.

Skinny says that girls are all right sometimes but

they are not much good getting through barbwire fences.

I didn't stop to look at the falls or the rock but hurried down into the ravine to the brook, where it foams past the mouth of our cave, and was just going to stoop to crawl in, when a voice yelled,

"Halt ! Who goes there ? "

I started back in surprise, because there hadn't been a sound before that, and I didn't know whether the Band was there or not.

Two fellows crawled out of the cave and stood, one on each side, with their clubs crossed in front, barring the way. Each one had a handkerchief tied over the lower part of his face, for a mask.

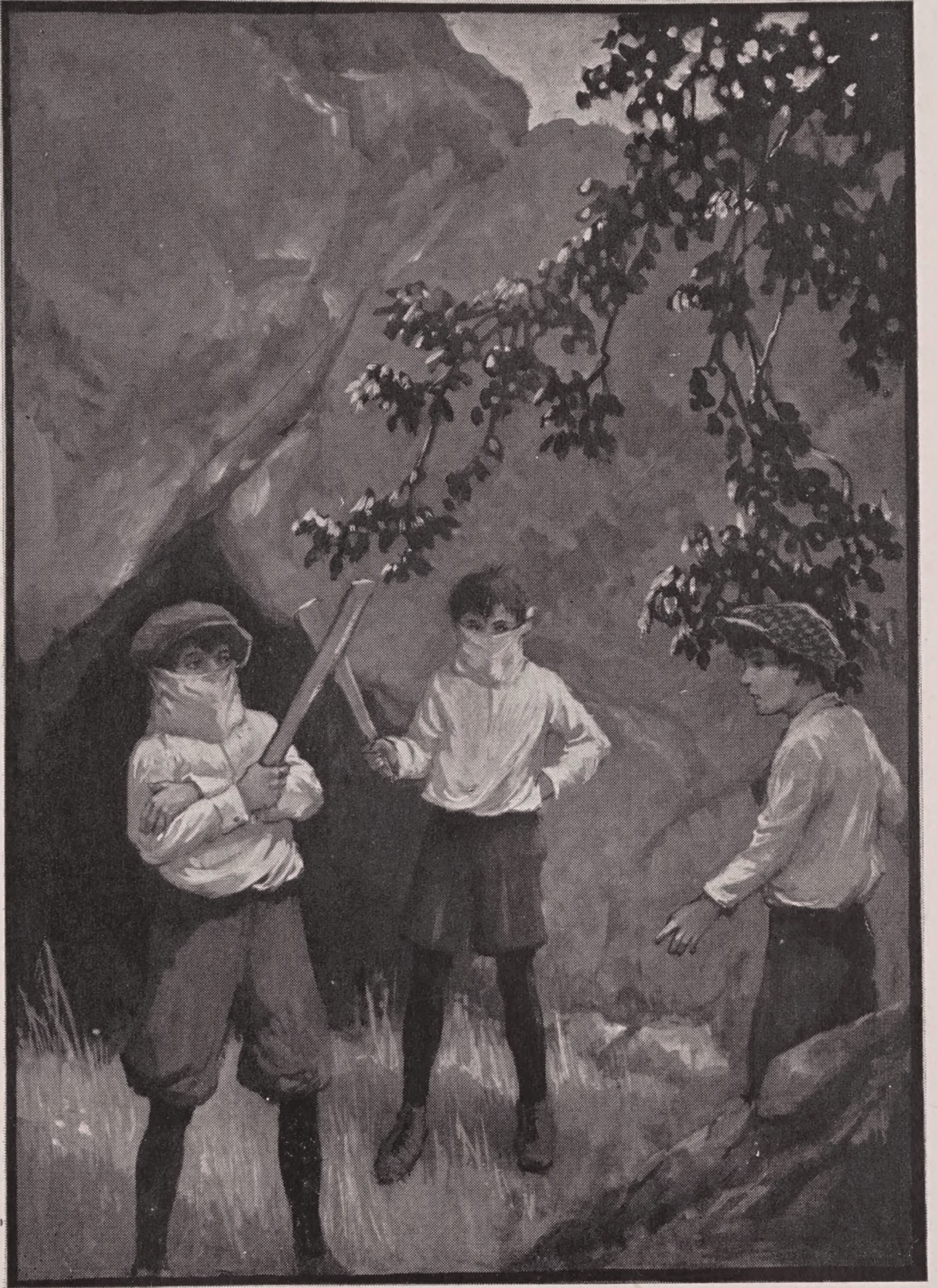
"Who goes there ? " he shouted again.

"A friend," I told him.

"Advance, friend, and give the countersign," he said, but stood right in the way so that I couldn't advance worth a cent.

I thought for a minute. "Bunker Hill," I told him, for that 'most always is Skinny's countersign, on account of his ancestors.

"Bunker nothin' ! It's something you heard of only the other night, when you came home from Bowen's Corners."



"WHO GOES THERE?" SHOUTED THE BIGGEST FELLOW AGAIN.

“Stony Ledge ! ” I said.

“Stony Ledge she is. You have passed the first test. The prisoner now will draw the Sign.”

He handed me a piece of chalk and I drew on the rock our Sign, calling a meeting of the Band at nine o'clock.

“Fiend in human form ! ” yelled Gory Gabe, the Bandit King, shaking his club. “Look at the time. It is twenty minutes past the hour. The gang is waiting.”

“Your Gory Highness,” I said, trying to get my wits together, “may I speak and live ? ”

“You may; but first enter. What happens will happen.”

We crawled into the cave and the boys set up a shout when they saw the secretary. Skinny pounded with his hatchet, until they were quiet.

“Now let the varlet speak,” he hissed, taking off his mask.

“I was late in starting,” I told him, “on account of having to work an hour, but I could have made it, only the woodbox was empty and Mother saw me sneaking up the hill.”

“She wanted the wood,” I went on, hurriedly, for not a boy said a word and Skinny had begun to

shake his hatchet in a fierce way, "because she had to fry some doughnuts."

"'Tis well," he shouted. "Let be what is. The meetin' will now come to order."

The meeting was about going to Stony Ledge, back of Greylock, the place Mr. Norton wanted us to see. Mr. Norton said he couldn't go for a couple of weeks, when Skinny asked him about it, and maybe not then.

"What's the matter with our going alone?" said Skinny.

"You could, I suppose. You are Boy Scouts, and Boy Scouts know how to take care of themselves pretty well. There is a good main road all the way and most of the trails are marked. Better ask your folks. I am willing, if they are."

"And that is why we are holdin' this 'ere meetin'," Skinny told us, after the secretary had called the roll and we had heard about Mr. Norton. "My folks say that I can go if I promise not to get lost. Lost nothin'! You can't lose me. They thought we were lost, that time we camped all night on East mountain but, betcher life, I knew where we were and where we wanted to be, only we couldn't get there."

"It was just the same with me, the time I sprained my ankle on Greylock and you were all looking for me," said Bill. "Great snakes! I'd 'a' been looking for you, if I could have walked. I sent up smoke signals, all right, and don't you forget it."

"How about it, fellers? Shall we go?"

There was a chorus of caws, when the secretary called the roll.

"It's unimous," said Skinny. "How about having Pedro get his father's horse and wagon?"

"He wouldn't let us take it, I know," I told him. "This is a busy time with him and he needs it himself."

"Then I suppose we'll have to walk. It will take more lunch. Climbing mountains makes a feller hungry."

"Guess what," said Benny, edging up close to the opening, where he could get out without losing any time, "Skinny read it in a book."

The President made a grab for the Gentleman from Park street, without waiting to adjourn, but Benny wasn't there. He was outside the cave, yelling like an Indian and standing ready to splash water on anybody who chased him.

We started for Stony Ledge early next morning,

carrying some things to camp with and plenty to eat in our Boy Scout packs.

"Take the car to Cheshire Harbor," Mr. Norton told us. "A fairly good road goes up from there. Keep on until you come to the Greylock road, from Pittsfield; then turn down that and you will see the Stony Ledge trail in about a minute. A sign reads, 'Stony Ledge and Hopper Trail,' or something like that."

"There will be another kind of sign when we get there," bragged Skinny.

"Better go easy on that stuff. The mountain is a state park, you know, and pretty well looked after. If it wasn't, I shouldn't want you to go alone."

We turned up a road into the woods, just north of Cheshire Harbor. The morning was cool and we felt fine. From down below, on the left, beyond a stone wall, came the murmuring of Bassett's brook, loud at first, sort of calling us to come down and have some fun; then, fainter and fainter, as the road climbed higher and higher, leaving the brook behind. The brook was climbing, too, but not so fast.

Birds were twittering and chirping in the trees,

which lined the road on both sides much of the way. But once in a while there would be a clearing and then, far ahead, we would catch glimpses of some wooded hill. Cool breezes fanned our faces, as we hurried on through sunshine and shadow, and high above our heads great, white clouds played tag in the sky.

"What are we, Bill?" asked Benny. "Injuns, or Boy Scouts, or Bandits?"

"Great snakes!" said Bill. "We are all three and then some. Wait a minute; I can't stand it."

He put down his pack, took a long breath and commenced. It was awful to listen to, even when we knew what was doing it.

"Everybody caw," shouted Skinny, when Bill finally stopped for breath.

Say! They knew Raven Patrol was on the trail.

We climbed for a mile or more, and were beginning to get warm and a little out of breath, when we came to an apple orchard. Beyond was a red farm house, almost entirely surrounded by mountains. It had a nice shady stoop, with a hammock on it. I saw Skinny looking at the hammock, and I guess we all were thinking the same thing, when we heard a deep voice say,

"You've only got four miles more to go."

Skinny groaned, thinking of those four miles, and we looked around to find out who was talking but couldn't see anybody; so we went on.

Beyond the house and barn it began to look wild and scary. Then, all of a sudden, from up the winding road we heard a fearful clatter coming towards us, as if an army was charging.

"Injuns!" shouted Bill, grabbing his Boy Scout hatchet and looking around for some place to hide.

"Charge, my braves!" yelled Skinny, beginning to unwind his rope. "Charge! But spare the women and children."

But we didn't do any charging, for just then they came around the turn in the road, in a cloud of dust—a mass of horns and big animals of some kind; they looked like a million.

"Guess what," groaned Benny. "It ain't Indians; it's buffaloes."

Down they came on a run, filling the road from one side to the other. It paralyzed us at first; then Skinny shouted for us to run and we made for the fence.

There was no time to climb over or through; they were upon us, before we could have said Jack Robin-

son more than two or three times. We could only stand there, hugging the fence and hoping that their horns would miss us. I could see Skinny sort of swallowing hard, as the leaders swerved out a little and passed without touching him. Then, when he saw what they were, he began to get mad.

Just as the last ones were passing, he gave a yell, whirled his lasso around his head, threw, and braced himself. He couldn't miss they were so close together. The loop hung in the air a second; then settled over one of the horns.

There was another yell, this time of fright, as Skinny was jerked into the road and went bounding along after the herd, touching the ground about every ten feet. He was scared; it was easy to see that, and so were we, for we knew that if he fell he would be dragged. Tearing along after Skinny, barking and growling, was a dog, and, chasing after the dog and yelling, was a man.

We didn't know what to make of it at first, as we watched Skinny go sailing down the road, trying to keep on his feet. If he should fall once, there would be no Stony Ledge for us that day.

“Let go ! Let go !” shouted the farmer.

But Skinny Miller isn't built that way. He never lets go. Besides the dog was close behind him.

"Great snakes!" said Bill. "We've got to help Skinny. Come on."

We found them in a fence corner by the barn, about twenty cows and a bull, all but one. That one was on the other side of the road, fastened to one end of the lasso and looking surprised. Skinny had wound the other end around a fence post and stood there panting and wiping the sweat from his face.

"I lassoed the critter, betcher life," said he.

"Of all the fool tricks, that was the limit—" began the farmer. "Say, did you boys leave the gate open and let those cows out?"

"We couldn't," Benny told him. "We were on the way up and they were on the way down, when we first saw them. Gee, I was scared."

"They belong to a neighbor," the farmer explained. "They were afraid of the dog. Where are you boys bound for?"

"Up on the mountain."

"Well, you are off the trail. 'Most everybody misses it right here. There it goes over on the other side of the barn."

We sat around in the shade a while and talked to the farmer, for we were tired and hot, especially Skinny.

“It is great here,” we told him.

“It is fine in summer,” he said, “but the winters are fierce.”

Looking back the way we had come, we could see in the distance two hills, or mountains, sloping down to form a big letter V, and looking through the V, far beyond we could see the houses of East Cheshire, with the Hoosac range beyond them. Back of us the trail disappeared up the mountain, into a pine wood. To the north was a meadow; then more mountains; and far up the valley, nothing but mountains.

“I can sit on my front porch, in the evening,” said the farmer, “and see the lights of the automobiles, as they come down Mohawk Trail, over Florida mountain, into North Adams.”

After we had rested, we went over to the trail and started up again, among the pine trees. It was a steady climb now and we grew hot and thirsty, but it was great, just the same, with the smell of pine woods, and crows cawing over on the mountain.

“Caw ! Caw !” we answered back.

“Caw ! Caw-caw !” they cried, as if they belonged to Raven Patrol and were glad to be alive and getting hungry.

CHAPTER V

THE TRAIL TO STONY LEDGE

“HALT !” shouted Skinny, after we had walked an hour or more — a steady climb. “Listen !”

“Great snakes ! Skinny,” said Bill, “if you do any more lassoing, catch ’em going up hill instead of down. We’ll get there quicker.”

Skinny didn’t say a word, only held up one hand for us to keep quiet. As Bill stopped speaking, there came to our ears the sweetest music you ever heard, when you were thirsty, anyhow — the gurgling of a mountain brook.

Maybe you never climbed the Greylock range, so thirsty that your tongue was hanging out, and, all of a sudden, heard the noise of water pouring over the rocks. If you never did, you don’t know how good that mountain brook sounded to us. With a glad shout, we rushed forward; around a bend in the road we came to a bridge, across a little stream. In less than a minute eight boys were lying down with their faces in the water, sipping up great mouthfuls.

There are any number of such streams among the Berkshire Hills. Mr. Norton thinks a lot of them, and so do we, for they are great fun. He called them "the glory of New England," when we were talking around the campfire, on Tophet brook. He told us something else, too, — something which maybe I ought to have put down before but it will go here just as well.

"Your Bob's Hill," he said, "and Greylock and the valley and mountains where you boys play, are the very prettiest part of the Berkshire Hills, which are famous for their beauty. Man has done more for the scenery, down Lenox way, in the southern part of Berkshire county, where very wealthy people have beautiful homes and parks, and have walled them in, but up here is where Nature lives. The wild beauty here is God's work. We are doing our best to spoil it with our mill towns but up here among the hills we can see God's own beautiful thoughts and the work of His hands."

It is true, too, for on the face of Greylock there is a great letter E, which shows real plain from some places. My mother says that E stands for Eternal and that God carved it there; but the writing isn't very good.

Anyhow, it feels great, when you are hot and thirsty, to souse your head in mountain water and hold your wrists in it, until your blood has cooled. It seemed a good place to eat, although it wasn't noon yet.

I don't know how we happened to do it, but, after a while, we crossed a road without noticing that it was the Pittsfield road where we should have turned off — without thinking about it, even. It was not good Scout work, as Mr. Norton told us afterward. We did it, anyhow, and it was not the only poor Scout work we did that day.

But when we came to another road, or maybe it was the same one in another place, for the roads wind and twist around in climbing the mountain, we thought of what our scoutmaster had told us about the Stony Ledge trail. Soon we found a good road leading off and followed that. The road kept going down and I didn't like the looks of it, but we went on until we met two men who were fixing it with a machine.

"Will you tell us where this road goes to?" asked Skinny, politely.

"It goes to North Adams," one of the men said.

"Gee whizz!" groaned Skinny, looking around

at us. "We've passed the trail, fellers, and have got to go back. I'm kind of tired, too, lassoing that buffalo and everything."

Back we climbed. The road wound around and around, until we didn't know where we were and couldn't find the place where we had come into it.

"We didn't follow the North Adams trail this far," said Harry, "I know we didn't. I thought they couldn't lose you on these mountains, Skinny."

Just then we came out into the open and saw a high steel tower ahead of us. I knew where we were then, and so did Skinny.

"They can't," said he. "Betcher life, I know where we are. We are on top of Greylock."

We hadn't meant to go up on Greylock at all but that is where we were, and we didn't know where Stony Ledge was, any more than the man in the moon.

As long as we were on top of Greylock, we thought we might as well walk around a little. We went over to the east side, where we could see Plunkett's woods and the top of Bob's Hill, far below, and talked things over. Some of the boys were for climbing down the land-slide, which reaches

like a great streak down the face of the mountain. Skinny wanted to go to Stony Ledge.

"What would Mr. Norton think," he asked, "if we went back and told him that Raven Patrol couldn't find Stony Ledge?"

That settled it. "But where is it?" Andy asked.

"Search me. Anyhow, we know where we are. It's the Ledge that is lost."

A man showed us the way to the right trail; told us just where to turn and everything.

"Follow that trail, he said, "until you come to an east and west road; then turn to the left. You can't miss it."

"Guess what," said Benny, dodging behind Bill. "Skinny can miss it, if anybody can."

We found it, at last, just where Mr. Norton had told us it would be, with a sign on it, reading "Stony Ledge and Hopper Trail."

It made us feel rested and we started on a run. The trail led down hill, winding through the woods. We finally came to a cross-trail and another mountain brook. On the other side of this trail there was a sign, "Hopper Trail," but the sign didn't say anything about Stony Ledge. Hopper Trail went down hill too fast to suit me.

"Stony Ledge is a mountain," I said, "not a valley. If we keep going down, where will we come out?"

"We ought to have taken that cross-trail by the brook," said Bill. "I 'most know we had. Let's go back."

That seemed the thing to do and we felt sure of it a little later when, after we had followed the cross-trail for a quarter of an hour, we came out on a good road.

"Turn to the left, fellers," Skinny told us. "That is what the man said."

Away we went down the road, on a run. It was such a good road we knew that it must lead somewhere.

"We are all right," shouted Hank, who was on ahead. "I see a sign. It points the way, I'll bet."

It did. We found the words, "To Stony Ledge," and a hand pointing, only it pointed back the way we had come.

We all groaned and Bill threw a rock at it. If he had hit, there would have been no more sign, but he missed. Then we walked back up the road again, too tired and disappointed to talk.

"Fellers," said Skinny, at last. "Brace up. It stands to reason that Stony Ledge is somewhere. I don't know where it is and I don't know what it is; but it is somewhere and it is something, and, betcher life, Gory Gabe and his Gang are going to find it. Everybody caw."

By the time the noise had stopped we were all feeling better, especially Bill.

"Wait a minute," said he. He stood on his hands and gave a fierce yell. "Now they will know we are coming."

"I guess maybe we ought to have turned to the right instead of to the left," said Skinny, when we had come to the cross-trail. "So we'll keep going."

In a few minutes more we came to a foot-path, leading from the road down into a grassy place, and the sign on it said, "To Campground." Down there, wading in a brook, we saw two small boys.

We found their father, not far away, and asked him the way to Stony Ledge. He looked at us in surprise.

"Are you kids running around this mountain alone?" said he.

"Sure!" said Skinny. "We are on the way to Stony Ledge."

The man said something, which we couldn't hear. "Well," he went on. "I'll put you on the right trail."

"Maybe you can tell us how to get out of here, after we have seen Stony Ledge," said Skinny, hopefully.

"Where do you want to go?"

"Oh, anywhere."

"Which way did you come?"

"Up Cheshire Harbor Trail."

"That is Cheshire Harbor trail, up there."

He pointed up in the air to a high wooded ridge, which stood out against the sky.

"It will be a hard climb of five hundred feet," he went on, "and I shouldn't advise you to try it, unless you know what you are about."

It made Skinny kind of mad, when the man seemed to think he didn't know what he was about but the man didn't pay any attention.

"You boys come with me," said he, in a gruff voice.

We walked over to a sort of road, leading off into the distance, almost level at first, then climbing a little hill and disappearing among some trees.

"This is Stony Ledge Trail," he snapped. "You

go along that trail, until you come to a railing, and that is the place to look."

"And when you come back," he went on, biting off his words as if he was mad about something, "you take that trail there."

He pointed to a path, which soon lost itself in a pine wood.

"That is Hopper Trail to Williamstown. It is two or three miles farther that way than by Cheshire Harbor Trail but it is down hill through the Hopper. We'll have five more hours of sun; there will be time."

"And remember," he called after us, "the rule on Greylock is to go straight up or straight down, if you get lost. Whichever way you go, two hours will take you to safety."

"Great snakes!" said Bill, when the man was out of hearing. "Pedro, see if my head is on straight. I thought he was going to take it off."

Stony Ledge is worth seeing. Skinny told me to put it in the minutes of the meeting but how can I do it without a picture or something? When we had come to the railing the man spoke about, we knew what he meant when he said, "That is the place to look." The railing was put there, a little

way back from the edge, to keep folks from going too close where they might fall off.

We stood there looking a long time, without saying a word. Benny was the first to speak.

"It's a hopper, all right," he said. "I never knew before why they call it the Hopper."

"Betcher life, it's a hopper," Skinny told him, "and it's a whopper."

When we look at Greylock from the east side, where we live in a valley between two mountain ranges, we see Bob's Hill; then meadows, gently sloping up until the real mountain is reached; then a great wooded range, with Greylock towering above the rest of the range, like a big giant. The top of the mountain is almost straight across and it slopes down just the same, on each side, to the rest of the range. It doesn't look that way from anywhere else but it does from where we live.

Now we were looking from the west at the back of Greylock, — from a lower peak, perhaps two thousand feet high and maybe more. In front of us stood the giant looking a little round-shouldered; we could see the whole sweep of his broad back, rising up out of the valley below, twenty-five hundred feet or more, just green tree-tops, without a break.

At the left, two other peaks sloped down at different angles, forming what looked like a sharp edge of tree-tops, where their sides came together. And there was nothing in sight but tree-tops — all kinds of green, from the new green of the maples to the almost-black of the pines, which we could see in great splotches here and there.

At the right, in the same way, arose the green slope of another peak. The peak where we stood, a stony ledge, was lower than the others, almost straight up and down and without trees to spoil the view. Down below, I don't know how far, maybe fifteen hundred feet, was a great green trough filled with growing trees. Out of this trough rose the mountain peaks, their wooded slopes forming its sides.

That trough was the Hopper. Wherever we looked we saw nothing but tree-tops, so close together and so far away, they seemed like giant moss, or like a wonderful carpet, or a lake of green, with high waves at the sides standing motionless. Down below somewhere, under the carpet, at the bed of the lake, Hopper Trail went winding down among the trees, toward Williamstown. We couldn't see it but we knew it was there.

"I'll tell you what," I said, after a while. "Let's come up again in October, when those leaves are crimson and gold."

"The Secretary will put it in the minutes of the meetin'," said Skinny.

We had been so interested looking that we hadn't noticed what was back of us, until of a sudden we heard,

"Ba-a ! Ba-a ! Ba-a !"

We turned, and there stood a flock of sheep, looking at us and wondering, I guess, what we were doing and how long we were going to stay.

"Mountain goats, fellers !" exclaimed Skinny, "like Robinson Crusoe saw that time."

He fingered his rope, as the sheep edged nearer and nearer, when we didn't move or do anything to scare them.

"I'll bet I can lasso that big one," he went on. "Robinson Crusoe hadn't anything on us. He had a gun and all we have is a rope."

We didn't think he would do it, after what had happened when he lassoed the cow, but when the big fellow came up close, Skinny couldn't help it. He just had to throw.

The frightened animal jumped back, jerking

Skinny off his feet; then he ran around in a circle, close to the edge of the cliff, Skinny following and pulling back all he could.

Suddenly the sheep whirled and lunged in the other direction, swinging Skinny around like the boy on the end, when you play crack-the-whip. Before we could help him or had time to think even, there was a terrible cry of despair, and Skinny plunged into the Hopper.

CHAPTER VI

HOPPER TRAIL

WHEN something terrible happens, all of a sudden, it kind of dazes a fellow and he doesn't know what to do. All I could think of was Skinny falling down, down, into Devil's Hopper and whether the sheep would fall on top of him or he on top of the sheep.

I don't know how long we stood there, with that awful scream ringing in our ears; probably only a second or two but it seemed minutes. The sheep was yelling, too, "ba-a," and struggling to keep from being pulled over the edge, but Skinny's weight and the jerk when he plunged over were too much for him and he was being slowly dragged toward the Hopper.

Bill was the first to move. I heard him say, "Great snakes !" under his breath. Then, in two jumps, he was on top of the sheep, bracing his feet and yelling for help. The rest of us jumped almost as quickly as he did and grabbed the rope wherever we could get hold of it.

"Pedro," said Bill. "we can hold him. Crawl to the edge where you can see and tell us what to do."

Throwing myself flat on my face, I hitched forward, until I could see over the edge. There was Skinny, with the end of the rope wound around his hands and hanging on for dear life. On his face was a look which I never can forget. Far down below were the tops of trees, like giant moss, at the bottom of the Hopper.

He saw me looking down and tried to smile but couldn't.

"How long can you hang on, Skinny?" I asked.

"I don't know," said he, wetting his lips with his tongue. "Not long. You'll have to hurry."

"Hold on for a minute and we'll have you up. Steady, Bill. Don't jerk the rope. Now! All together! Pull!"

With me telling them what to do and Skinny trying to help with his feet, they pulled him up, a little at a time; then one after another would get a fresh hold on the rope, brace himself and pull again.

"Grab me, Pedro," he gasped, when he was almost up. "I can't hang on much longer. It 'most tore my arms loose, when I fell over."

"You've got to hang on," I told him, as I reached for his collar and managed to get one hand under his arm at the shoulder. I was out over the edge myself and scared half out of my wits. "If you let go now, we are both goners."

In another second Bill had grabbed him under both arms and the boys were pulling on Bill, catching hold wherever they could, as if he had been a rope. Soon Skinny lay flat on his stomach, at the edge of the cliff, with his feet still hanging over.

Nobody said anything for a second. I was trying to wriggle back from the cliff without falling over and the others were getting their breath, I guess. Then we all began to talk at once except the sheep. He was too far gone or too scared.

"Is your leg broken, Skinny?" we asked.

"I guess not," he told us, faintly. "I can move it but I hit my knee a fearful whack, when I went over."

He struggled to his feet; then his face went white and he sank back, with a little moan, "I can't stand my weight on it," he said.

Bill looked at me and I looked at him, both of us nearly paralyzed. There we were at the jumping-off place, with a whole mountain range between

us and home, our patrol leader couldn't walk and we didn't have anything to eat. It was enough to paralyze anybody.

"The first thing to do," Bill told us, "is to have a look at that knee."

Bill is assistant patrol leader and knows all about first-aid-to-the-injured stunts. Skinny felt better in a moment and by that time we had his knee bare. It was swollen and looked pretty bad but no bones seemed to be broken.

The "mountain goat" still lay where we had jumped on him, when we tried to keep him from going over the cliff. We thought he was dead.

"Anyhow," said Benny, trying to be cheerful, "we got Skinny's goat, all right."

But just then the sheep scrambled to his feet, shook himself a little, bleated faintly once or twice and limped away.

"My rope!" cried Skinny. "He's got my rope."

"Oh, forget it," I told him. "We've had rope enough for one day."

Skinny wouldn't have it that way. He was bound to get that rope. It took us ten minutes to catch the sheep but we cornered him finally and took off the lasso.

"Now," said Bill, "we've got to carry Skinny down to the brook, where the man was camping. Then we can bathe his knee and maybe the man will help us. Pedro, you and I will make a chair and carry him as far as we can; then the others can take turns."

He grabbed his own left wrist with his right hand and I did the same with mine. Then I took hold of his other wrist with my free hand and he did the same to me. Our four hands placed that way made a seat. Mr. Norton, our scoutmaster, had us do it sometimes, when we were practicing our Scout stunts, but we knew all about making a chair long before we ever heard of Boy Scouts.

We stooped down until the chair was close to the ground and the other boys put Skinny into the seat; then we stood up. And there he was, riding in a comfortable chair, with his arms around our shoulders to steady himself. It was easy to carry him that way, although he grew pretty heavy after a time and we had to change boys about half way down.

"Where's the rope?" he asked, when Andy and Harry were making a chair.

"Benny has it," I told him.

"No, I haven't" said Benny. "I thought some one else took it."

Nobody had Skinny's rope. We had left it lying on the ground at Stony Ledge.

"Never mind the rope, Skinny," urged Bill. "Your knee is swelling fast. We've got to get you to the brook and do it quick."

"Run back and get it, Benny, that's a good feller," said Skinny. "We'll wait for you at the brook. You never dast go out without a rope and that is the best rope I ever had. Where'd I be now, if it hadn't been for that rope and the sheep on the end of it?"

Benny reached the brook with the rope almost as soon as we did and Skinny coiled it around his shoulders. He wasn't going to take any chances.

We bathed the knee for a long time, until the swelling went down and it began to feel better but our troubles had only commenced. The man and the two little boys had broken camp and were gone. We called, trying to make them hear, but it wasn't any use. We were alone in the mountains, and Skinny not able to walk.

Once when Bill sprained his ankle, just after he had started down Greylock into the Hopper, he was

able to crawl back to the top, to where he could see down into Hoosic valley. Maybe he could have seen us looking for him if he had had a glass. Anyhow, he could see the houses of the village and could send up smoke signals.

This was different. The whole of Greylock was between us and home. We were somewhere on the mountain west of Greylock, and there wasn't anybody to see our signals, if we made them. It didn't look good to me.

"Try to walk, Skinny," urged Bill, after we had bandaged his knee. "We've got to get home somehow before dark, or go hungry."

Skinny tried his best, gritting his teeth, but had to give it up. He couldn't carry any weight on that knee.

"Maybe I could hop on one foot," he said, "if somebody helped me a little."

Bill shook his head and looked around at us in despair.

"Mr. Norton says," I told him, "that when we get into trouble we should talk it over calmly and sensibly, decide what is best to do and then do it."

"I'll tell you what," said Skinny, finally, after we had talked it over quite a while. "You fellers

leave me here by the brook and go down the mountain for help. Go down the Cheshire Harbor Trail; that is nearest. The trouble is that you might not get back before morning and there isn't anything to eat. Gee, I am hungry already but I can stand it, if I have to."

"We won't do it," Bill told him. "We are not going to leave you."

"Then let somebody stay with me. You can't all stay. It might be several days before anybody came along."

"We might get lost trying to find the trail," objected Harry. "Don't you remember the man said not to try it, if we didn't know what we were about."

"Betcher life, I know what I am about," Skinny told him.

"And if we did get lost, we'd be in the same fix that we are in now and would have to camp out until morning, with nothing to eat and maybe nothing to drink."

"Guess what," said Benny, "we could get help on top of Greylock, maybe. The man said for us to go straight up or straight down. Only we might wander around until dark, just like Harry said, and

have to stay until morning. Mr. Norton told us not to do any mountain climbing after dark."

"Great snakes!" cried Bill, jumping to his feet. "Let's carry him and go straight down through Hopper Trail. We carried him down here and we can carry him farther, if we take turns. There are seven of us. That is three chairs and one boy besides. We know exactly where Hopper Trail is, and if we follow that trail we can't get lost. We will come out somewhere, sometime."

"But where and when?" I asked him. "It is a long way to Williamstown, two or three miles farther than to go the Cheshire Harbor way, the man told us."

"I don't know," he said, "but I am going to find out. It is the only thing to do. We will come across a farmhouse somewhere. I shouldn't wonder if there was somebody camping out down in the Hopper, on Money brook. Come on, Pedro. Let's make a chair. It probably won't be far; I 'most know it won't."

Say! We wished that Skinny was as light as his name, before we had gone a mile. Skinny weighs a ton, or you would think so, if you had to carry him far.

We made a chair with our hands and started. It was fun at first. The trail was a broad path, leading down through the prettiest pine woods you ever saw. It was one of the splotches of dark green on the mountain side, which we had seen from Stony Ledge. We were some rested, too, and Skinny was beginning to feel fine, only he couldn't walk.

"It's like a battle, fellers," said he, "and you are carrying the wounded back to our cave. There is a cave down there. Don't you remember the old den which we found that time, near Money brook? Let's look for it; I'd like to see it again."

"Nothing doing!" Bill told him, stopping to wipe the sweat off his face. "We couldn't find the cave, if we wanted to, and, believe me, we don't want to. If you feel so all-fired good, suppose you keep away the pesky flies that are bothering us."

Bill didn't mean to be cross but Skinny was getting heavy and swarms of flies were following us and lighting on our faces. It was hot down there in the Hopper. There was no air stirring, for the mountains on every side cut off the breeze. The flies and mosquitoes were fierce.

The trail led down hill fast. Pretty soon we were out of the pine woods and among maples and chest-

nuts and trees like those, which have flat leaves. We could see their leaves fluttering in the breeze, high above our heads, and wished we were up there. Once in a while we heard a crow calling.

“Caw, caw-caw !” we shouted back.

“I wonder if the eight of us couldn’t lick the guy that told us to come this way,” groaned Bill, when it came his turn to help carry Skinny again. “I’d like to give him a good punch right now.”

But when we had come to a little mountain brook and stopped to rest and drink and bathe our faces in the cool water, it seemed a good place to be, after all. The swarm of flies had left us. We knew that we probably should pick up another swarm farther down but there in the open it was fine.

We sat there a long time, cooling off and listening to the brook. Bill felt so much better that he gave a few yells, which sounded awful there, in the lonesomeness of the Hopper.

“I’ll tell you what,” said Skinny, when we were ready to start again. “Some of you guys take my hatchet and cut me a pair of crutches. I’ll bet I could walk, if I had crutches.”

“Skinny,” said Bill, “you’ve got a great head — like a tack.”

It took quite a while to find sticks with the right kind of crotches to fit under Skinny's arms but we did find some at last and cut them off the right length. They were not very good ones and hurt his arms but he could use them, with a boy on each side to balance him.

After that it was easier, for Skinny would hobble along on his crutches awhile; then two of us would carry him as far as a certain spot we could see down the trail; then he would walk again, and then another couple would make a chair for him.

In this way we kept going pretty fast. The trail was more level now and we knew that we must have reached the bottom of the Hopper. How far it was to anywhere, we didn't know, but we kept going and walked miles and miles. As Bill had said, we were bound to come out somewhere, sometime, and we couldn't get lost.

Benny was the first to hear it. He had gone on ahead to explore, carrying a big stick. Pretty soon he came tearing back up the path. We thought he was scared.

"Injuns!" yelled Bill, hunting around for a club, while Skinny propped himself up against a tree and began to unwind his rope.

"Charge !" he shouted. "At them, my braves, but spare the women and children."

As he spoke, he forgot all about his knee and started to charge. There was a howl of pain and he would have fallen, if two of us hadn't quickly grabbed him.

"Hurry," called Benny. "We are there."

"Where ?" I asked.

"I thought we were here," said Bill.

"Just the same," Benny told him, "I heard a cow-bell."

We hurried on and pretty soon we heard it, too.

Maybe you never were out that way in the Hopper, when it was almost dark and you had begun to think you never would get anywhere, and then heard the tinkle of a cow-bell, off in the woods. It's music, all right.

Bill gave a whoop and a yell that set the bell ringing in great shape, as the cow started to run, but we didn't care. That cow-bell told us that at last we were out of the Hopper, on somebody's farm.

Pretty soon we came out into the open and saw a corn field; a little beyond was a barn and then a house.

"Pedro," said Skinny, "how would it be for you

and Bill to go up and ask for a drink ? Maybe they will give us something to eat."

A woman came to the door. She didn't seem very glad to see us but she gave us a drink.

"How far is it to Williamstown ?" I asked.

"Five miles."

Bill groaned. "How will we do it," said he, "and Skinny not able to walk."

"Who is Skinny ?"

"He's our patrol leader," I told her. "We are Boy Scouts. He hurt his knee up on the mountain and can't walk. We carried him 'most of the way down. He is awful hungry."

"Why, bless my heart !" she cried. "Hungry and can't walk ? Bring him here instantly."

We hurried back after him. Skinny wanted to go on his crutches but Bill said no; it would look worse if we carried him. A few minutes later we limped up to the door, with Skinny in our chair and the other boys trailing behind.

She gave one look and started for the cellar. When she came back, she was bringing a pail of milk and a loaf of bread.

"Groan for the lady," whispered Bill, giving Skinny a punch. "Maybe she will bring out some

pie and take us to Williamstown in an automobile." Which was exactly what she did, all but the pie.

Our folks were almost crazy when we reached home, long after dark. Folks are always thinking a boy is going to get hurt or something.

CHAPTER VII

PICNIC AT PECK'S FALLS

"I GUESS you have had all the mountain climbing you will want for a long time," my mother said, a few days after our trip to Stony Ledge.

The boys had come to our house after school one afternoon, to talk over some Scout stunts which we were going to do on the last day. Our teacher was getting up a last-day entertainment and she had heard so much about the Boy Scout business that she wanted us to do the things, in front of the school and the visitors.

"We'll not have time for any more climbing until vacation comes," Skinny told her. "Then we are going up on Florida mountain with Mr. Norton. The Indians used to go back and forth over that mountain and we want to find the old trail, so Mr. Norton can mark it down on a map."

"Well, I am glad that he is going with you. If he wasn't, I am afraid you would have to worry along without a secretary, or get a new one."

"Why, Mother," I said, "what have I done?"

"I don't know that you have done anything, but I am so deathly afraid that you will I can't take a minute's comfort while you are off on your wild goose chases."

"Just because I was a little late for supper the other night —" I began.

"But look what happened and what might have happened. Gabriel fell into the Hopper and was almost killed. It is a mercy that you ever got him out alive and that you did not fall in yourself. I don't like such carryings on."

"I only hurt my knee a little," Skinny told her. "It is almost well now. You see, I had my rope along. You are all right when you have a rope. It would have been just the same, Mrs. Smith, if Mr. Norton had been there. It happened so quickly nothing could have stopped me. I couldn't stop myself. All I could do was to hang on to the rope."

"It wasn't my doings, anyhow," I said. "It was Skinny's. All I did was to help pull him out and get him home."

Father came in just in time to hear what we were talking about.

"I am inclined to think that the young man is a little reckless with his rope," he began, "but, barring that, I don't see how the boys could have behaved better. They saved Gabriel, and then carried him down the mountain, without a whimper. I call that good work, and I am proud of them."

"Guess what," said Benny, getting ready to dodge. "Bill whimpered once. I heard him."

"Aw, I didn't, either," Bill told him. "When did I whimper?"

"I heard him say, 'Great snakes! I wish I had one of Pedro's mother's doughnuts!' 'They don't make such doughnuts anywhere else,' he whimpered."

"Bless my stars!" exclaimed Mother, starting for the pantry. "Here these boys are starving for doughnuts and I am standing around scolding."

"All the same," she went on. "I don't see how boys ever live to grow up."

A few minutes later we were all sitting out in the yard, eating doughnuts and wishing there were more.

"Whimper again, Bill," said Harry. But Bill wouldn't do it.

"The meetin' will come to order," said Skinny, as soon as he could talk. "Teacher wants us to do

some Scout stunts on Last Day and we told her that we would. What shall we do? If there was only a bear or something, I could lasso it."

"Lasso Sadie Jones," snickered Benny. "She is a dear. I heard you say so."

We all set up a shout at that and Bill stood on his hands and hollered. Mother came running out to see what the racket was about and then went in again, shaking her head.

"I never said such a thing," said Skinny, feeling for his handkerchief and finding that he had left it at home. "But that makes me think of something. Let's give a play and the Scout stunts will be a part of it. We can have Sadie and some of the other girls in it. Margy, for instance," looking hard at Bill.

After we had pounded Bill on the back, until it made him mad, he went on:

"Let's do this. Let's have a picnic on the platform — a play picnic, I mean — with Sadie and Margy and the others there ready to fry a beef-steak, only we haven't got any matches."

"Boy Scouts always have matches," Bill objected.

"And then," Skinny went on, waving one hand for Bill to keep quiet, "they will all stand around

wishing for beefsteak, with delicious gravy dripping off it and potatoes baked in the ashes and filled with butter, and —”

“Skip that part, Skinny,” groaned Andy. “You make me hungry.”

“Then I’ll happen along and one of the girls will say, ‘Have you a match, mister?’

“And I’ll say, ‘No, what do you want of a match?’

“‘To make a fire,’ they will tell me, ‘so we can cook this beefsteak. We’d give you some, if we had a match.’

“‘Shucks!’ I say. ‘You don’t need matches for that. Let me show you a thing or two.’

“Then you boys will help me and we’ll build a fire without matches, by whirling a stick, the way Mr. Norton taught us. Only it mustn’t be anything more than a tiny blaze, or we might set the schoolhouse on fire.”

The more we thought about it the better the scheme seemed. When we told the teacher she said it was great and praised us so much that Skinny got real chesty.

Skinny and Bill had to speak pieces, besides being in the play and helping in the Scout stunts. Skinny

was to speak first and then, Bill. It gave Skinny another idea.

"You sit near the front, Bill," he said, "and I'll take along my rope when I go up to speak. When I get through Teacher will say, 'We'll now listen to a recitation by William Wilson.' Then I'll lasso you and drag you up on the rostrum, with you hanging back all the way. Come on; what do you say? It will be great."

"I say that there is nothing doing," Bill told him. "It will be all I can do to think of my piece, without being lassoed. If you have to lasso anybody, lasso Teacher; then I won't have to speak."

"Have you told Sadie about the play?" I asked Skinny, on the way home from school.

"No, not yet. I sort of hate to tell her. Maybe she won't do it."

"We could have it just the same with boys," I told him.

"Yes, we could have something but we kind of ought to have girls at a picnic, or else it isn't a picnic. It's something but not a picnic."

"I don't know why it is," he went on after a moment, "but girls nowadays are a lot nicer than they used to be. They used always to be around

in the way, when we were little. Don't you remember? Of course, they can't lasso and things like that but they are all right at a picnic."

He needn't have worried about it. When we finally told Sadie and the others, they thought it would be fine.

"It will take a lot of practice," Sadie told us, because it must be done just right, or it will fall flat. I think we ought to have a real picnic at Peck's Falls, and have it right away. There isn't much time. We can practice there and nobody will be around to laugh at us when we make mistakes."

We had to have several picnics before we could work out the play just right. The first one was held the very next afternoon, after school. We had a good time, only it bothered us some on account of the cave. Our cave is a secret and we never let anybody know where it is. Sadie wanted to see it, and so did Margy.

We had finished practicing and had eaten our supper and were sitting around talking and thinking it was almost time to go home. It gets dark early in the woods, especially there at the foot of Greylock, for the sun goes down behind the high mountains and

Peck's Falls are in the shadow, when there is still sunshine down in the valley.

"We have heard that you have a perfectly lovely cave up here somewhere," Sadie told Skinny. "I just dote on caves. Don't you, Margy? We think you might let us see it."

"Oh, do," said Margy. "You know, Bill, you told me that maybe you would show it to me sometime."

Harry was sitting next to me when Margy said that and I could see that it made him mad. We hadn't thought that Bill would do a thing like that.

The other girls didn't say much but they set up such a lot of oh-ing and squealing that it made us tired. Skinny and Bill didn't know what to do or what to say. They told us afterward they were afraid that if we didn't show them the cave the girls wouldn't take part in the play and that would spoil Last Day. I could see Harry getting madder and madder.

"Pedro," he whispered, "when you see me sneak off through the bushes, you follow. We have got to stop this somehow or the first thing we know those two chumps will be showing them the cave. Tell Andy and Hank."

I whispered to Andy and he to Hank, and pretty soon the four of us crawled off into the bushes. We circled around until we came up back of where the girls were sitting in a bunch; then Harry gave the signal and we began.

Say ! If Bill had been there, it might have sounded worse but not much. Next to Bill, Andy is the best yeller in the Band, only he never had a fair chance before, with Bill around. This time he was mad, on account of the cave, and he turned himself loose. I never heard more awful screeching, as if he was being murdered or something. At the same time, Harry crashed around calling for help, and Hank and I set up a fearful wailing noise.

The girls gave a frightened chorus of screams, scrambled to their feet and started to run, scattering in every direction. I think Skinny and Bill were scared at first but they knew in a minute what it was and tried to get the girls to stop running. One after another, they came back again and we crept out of the bushes and sat down as if nothing had happened.

Skinny was mad and opened his mouth to say so, when he noticed that somebody was missing.

"Where is Sadie ?" he exclaimed.

We hadn't any of us missed her before. The girls looked around at one another, surprised.

"I haven't seen her since she started to run," said Margy.

None of the other girls knew where she had gone. They had been too busy saving themselves to know where anybody else went.

"O, Sadie ! Sadie-e-e !" Margy called. "Oo-oo, Oo-oo, Oo-oo !"

We listened and then from behind some bushes, near where we were standing, we heard a frightened voice cry, "Here I am."

We all made a run around the clump of bushes and came out into the path which leads to Pulpit Rock.

"Where are you, Sadie ?" Margy called again.

"Here," came the answer. "Out on Pulpit Rock."

We hurried to the edge of the ravine, where it drops off into the pool below Peck's Falls and where Pulpit Rock reaches almost to the other side, with a narrow ledge back of the pulpit part. There was Sadie, half-way across and scared out of her wits, for fear of falling.

She stood facing the pulpit, her arms outstretched,

trying to hold on to the smooth surface of the rock with her fingers. Back of her, straight down, fifty feet below and maybe more, was the pool, and nothing to keep her from falling but the narrow ledge on which she was standing.

She had run that way, when we first started to yell, not knowing where she was going, and then she crept out on the ledge to hide. At first she didn't think much about falling but when the yelling stopped and she found out who had been doing it, she began to grow dizzy. Then she was scared in earnest and had a right to be. She didn't dare look down, or speak, hardly. She could only shut her eyes and stand with her face to the rock, as we found her.

Some folks are like that. They get dizzy when they look down from any high place, where they could fall off. It gives me a funny feeling and makes the knuckles on my fingers ache, although I do it sometimes, of course.

Skinny was the first to speak. "Hold on tight, Sadie," he called. "We'll get you back in a jiffy."

"I don't dare look or move," she shuddered, "and there isn't anything to hold on to."

"I didn't bring my rope," he groaned. "You never ought to go to a picnic without a rope."

Then he began to edge his way carefully out on the ledge, facing the rock and talking to Sadie as he went along.

"You can't fall, if you don't look down," he told her. "Watch the way I do it. I am going to take hold of your hand and we'll go back together."

In a minute he was out there, still talking to her and trying to get her over being afraid. She grabbed his hand and they worked their way back, a few inches at a time. We boys do it often and even turn and face the falls. It is scary but easy enough, if you don't look down.

In two minutes more they were back, safe and sound, with the girls crowding around and all talking at once.

Harry nudged me and I went one side to find out what he wanted.

"We saved the cave, all right," said he, with a grin. "They never will think of the cave again."

CHAPTER VIII

LAST DAY OF SCHOOL

LAST day of school gives you a queer feeling, almost like Fourth of July, Christmas, or days like those. I do not mean the last day before the Holidays, or before the spring vacation. Those vacations are all right, only they are not long enough; they are just teasers. I mean the real Last Day, at the end of the school year, and all summer ahead for play.

You begin to think about it early in May, when the woods are filled with wild flowers and the trees on the mountains show green. It is hard to study then, when all outdoors is calling and beckoning and even Teacher looks out of the window, wishing she didn't have to work and that she could get out into it, I guess.

Finally, along in June, comes Last Day. You go to school all dressed up, whisper some if you want to, with Teacher not caring much, and show off in front of your folks and neighbors. They tiptoe in

and sit around the sides of the room and on the rostrum, or they do in our school, anyhow.

A buzz goes around when we see who it is. There comes Skinny Miller's mother. "Skinny, Skinny," the buzzing says; and Skinny pretends not to hear but looks across the room and grins, just the same.

After a while my folks come in. The boy in the seat behind pokes me in the back and everybody looks at me, and I can hear Bill whisper, "Pedro, see who is here," and I begin to wonder if I'll forget my piece.

Then we all go home, carrying our books and school things, almost silly with the joy of it, calling to this one and that one what we are going to do tomorrow. And tomorrow! And the other to-morrows coming! — more than two months of them, with no school to bother, and Bob's Hill, Peck's Falls, Greylock and the rest looking their best and waiting for us.

We never had a better Last Day than this one, when we did our Scout stunts, all dressed up in our Scout uniforms and with Mr. Norton, our scout-master, looking on and helping.

But first we spoke pieces and sang, and some of the girls played on the piano. There were so many

visitors we had to bring in chairs from another room. It made us feel proud.

Skinny never did better than when he spoke his piece. When he shook his fist and shouted, "Give me liberty or give me death!" it was great and they all applauded like everything, except Bill Wilson. He sat there in his seat, stiff and uncomfortable, with an anxious look on his face. He knew that he was to be the next one to speak and he was trying to remember his piece.

"William Wilson," said Teacher, reading from a paper, after Skinny had taken his seat and the room was quiet again.

Bill, looking scared, stumbled down the aisle to the rostrum. He swallowed hard once or twice, then began his piece about William Tell, the Swiss patriot, who is so glad to see the Alps mountains again that he talks to them, just as we boys do to Greylock sometimes.

From where he was standing Bill could see, through an open window, Greylock and Peck's Falls woods where our cave is, and almost could look into the Bellowspipe. It helped him some, I guess, for Last Day meant Vacation, and plenty of good times in the cave and among the mountains.

"Ye crags and peaks, I'm with you once again," he began, and went on in a loud voice, without a break, until he was almost half through.

"Ye guards of liberty," he shouted, looking through the window at Greylock and Bob's Hill, "I'm with you once again. I call to you with all my voice. I hold my hands to you —"

Just then Skinny caught his eye and made a motion, as if he was throwing a lasso and pulling him down off the rostrum. Teacher didn't see it but Bill did. He stammered, stopped, then tried to go on but couldn't think of what came next.

"With all my voice," he repeated, going back a little to where he could remember. "I hold my hands—my hands—I—I hold my hands to you—"

Bill was stuck. Skinny looked a little scared when he saw what he had done. It made us all squirm. I don't know why it is but it is that way almost always when somebody gets stuck.

Bill's face was growing redder and redder. He swallowed hard again, then went back for a running start.

"Ye guards of liberty, I'm with you once again. I call to you with all my voice. I hold my hands to you—I—I hold my hands to you, t-t-to—"

He looked around in despair. Then came in a low, soft voice, from down near the front,

"To show they still are free."

It was Margy. She had heard Bill say his piece so much at our picnics that she knew it herself. I don't see how she dared to do it but she did.

That saved Bill.

"I hold my hands to you," he shouted, "to show they still are free."

He reached out his arms toward Greylock but he was thankful in his heart to Margy. Then, with a smile and stepping forward toward the edge of the rostrum, he went on with the next line,

"I rush to you as if I would embrace you."

William Tell was thinking of the mountains when he said it but Bill was holding out his hands toward Margy, thinking, I guess, how glad he was that she had saved him.

It pretty nearly broke up Last Day. Even Teacher laughed, and Margy blushed like sixty. But Bill didn't care. He went on with his piece in great shape, only he didn't dare look at Skinny again. When he had finished there came the loudest clapping of all.

"Next we are going to show some of the activities

of the Boy Scouts," said Teacher, finally. "We have a number of Scouts in this room. But first their scoutmaster has consented to explain to us, in a few words, what this Boy Scout movement means."

"The boys of today," began Mr. Norton, "will be the men of tomorrow. The Boy Scout movement is merely a program for their proper development, in a natural way. We want those men of tomorrow to be the right kind of men and we start by making the boys of today the right kind of boys."

"Fifty-seven countries, representing more than a billion and a half of people, nearly all the people in the world, have adopted the Scout program. In the United States we have more than a third of a million Boy Scouts, and would have many more but for the difficulty in getting scoutmasters. Holding hands, with arms outstretched, these American Boy Scouts could reach almost across the continent, from the Atlantic to the Pacific."

"Our Scout motto is, 'Be Prepared.' We aim to prepare a boy to take care of himself at all times and under all circumstances. We teach him to be self-reliant, brave, helpful, thrifty, kind, dependable, etc., — in short, to become the best type of American citizen. It is all fun for the boy, the

things he best loves to do. In doing them he learns to keep himself 'physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight,' as the Scout oath puts it. He gets a fine physical training in the great and beautiful out-of-doors, and the foundations of his character are built strong. The ability of a Scout to take care of himself will be illustrated briefly in some acts and dialogues which are to follow."

First we had a knot-tying contest between two of the boys. Each one tied a half dozen knots in a small rope, holding them up for the school to see, while Mr. Norton explained what each knot was called and how it was used.

"The boys now will give an exhibition of flag signaling, using what is called the Two-arm Semaphore code," said Mr. Norton. "By this system messages can be sent as far as one can see the flags distinctly, not often more than a mile. Here are the flags we use. You will notice that they are about eighteen inches square and are divided diagonally into two parts, one red and the other white.

"The letters of the alphabet are indicated by the position of the arms, flags being used merely as extensions of the arms, to make them more easily seen. For example, to indicate the letters from A

to D the left hand holds a flag just above the knees and the right arm is moved upward. Half way to a horizontal position, means A; horizontal, B; half-way to a vertical position, C; straight over the head, D. To show the letters from E to G, these positions are reversed, the right arm being held down and the left arm moved upward. Other positions indicate other letters. In this way words and messages can be spelled out. It is very simple but requires accuracy in sending and a quick eye in receiving.

“I am going to ask Harry to do the signaling and to send the message, ‘Break camp at sunrise.’ One of my Scouts is in the room below and we’ll send for him to take the message. He has very quick eyes and, of course, does not know what message we have decided upon. Will the young man who called with all his voice go after Benny Wade?”

In a minute Benny came in with Bill, carrying two more flags. He was sent to the back of the room, while Harry went up on the rostrum.

“Just imagine that the boys are a mile apart and that it is necessary to get the message across without loss of time. All ready, boys. Send.”

It was like a three-ring circus. The folks didn’t

know where to look, whether at Benny or Harry or at the other Scouts sitting there and spelling out the words with their lips. But Benny knew. He watched every move that Harry made and as soon as the message had been finished he held out both his flags horizontally, one in each hand, and waved them up and down, until Harry replied with the same signal. It meant that he had understood.

"Well, Benny, what was the message?" Mr. Norton asked.

"Break camp at sunrise," Benny told him, and everybody clapped.

"Now, I'll ask Benny and the other Scouts to come up on the platform."

Benny was the last one up, having the farthest to go, and just as he reached the top step he stumbled and fell. All the visitors had been watching him and when he fell and didn't get up, we could hear some of them say, "Oh," under their breath. Skinny ran to help him; then turned to us.

"He has broken his ankle," he said. "Quick! Find something which we can use for splints."

Someone handed him a couple of shingles. Placing one on each side of the break, Skinny bound them tight in place with handkerchiefs.

"Make a stretcher," he called, when he nearly had finished.

Andy rushed out into the hall and came back with two poles, almost as soon as Hank and I could get our coats off. We turned the sleeves wrong side out and then laid the coats down on the floor, with their lower edges touching each other. The poles were pushed through the sleeves, one on each side, and the coats were buttoned, with the button side down. Then Benny was laid on the stretcher carefully and two of the boys carried him out of the room.

I shouldn't wonder if some of the visitors thought Benny really had been hurt, for when he came back with the other boys, a minute later, and didn't even limp, they seemed tickled about it.

"This little act has shown one meaning of our Scout motto," Mr. Norton told them. "Boy Scouts are prepared for all sorts of emergencies and accidents, particularly to rescue their comrades in cases of drowning."

The last act was best of all. The door from the hall opened and in came Sadie, Margy and some of the other girls, carrying baskets. They went up on the platform and started to have a picnic.

"My ! I am hungry," said Margy, after a while. "Hurry up, girls, and get a fire going. I'll cook you the best beefsteak you ever ate."

Then Sadie gave a little squeal. "I have forgotten the matches," she said. "What shall we do ? "

Just as she said that the door opened again and Skinny, followed by the other Scouts, walked in and up on the rostrum.

"Oh, mister," said Sadie, when she saw Skinny coming. "Will you let us have a match ? "

"I haven't any match," he told her. "What do you want of a match ? "

"We want to build a fire, so that we can cook our beefsteak. We are having a picnic. If you only had a match, we could give you some of the best beefsteak you ever tasted."

"Beefsteak sounds good to us," said Skinny. "We can build you a fire without matches. Can't we, fellers — I mean, fellows ? "

After some more talk, we built the fire, just as Boy Scouts are taught to do, without using matches. Of course, we had everything ready, out in the hall. We had seen to that the night before. We even had a piece of zinc, such as is put under stoves in

winter, and we built the fire on that, so that there would be no danger of burning the schoolhouse.

First we put a flat piece of wood down on the zinc. It was about three-fourths of an inch thick. That was our hearth, or fire-board. Next we needed a bow and spindle. The spindle was a piece of wood, which we had whittled out, about a foot long and three-fourths of an inch thick, at the middle. The ends had been rounded off but the middle part had been left with all kinds of corners.

The bow was a curved stick, about seventeen inches long. It can be longer. It was five-eighths of an inch wide and a half-inch thick. In the ends were holes for the cord, which was a leather thong. This cord was put on loose enough so that it could be wound once around the spindle. The roughness of the spindle was to keep the cord from slipping.

"We want a drill-socket," said Skinny.

One of the boys brought him a hemlock knot and he cut a little hole in the middle of it, for the end of the spindle to turn in. Then he cut a notch in the edge of the fire-board, a quarter-inch wide and a half-inch deep, and on top of the fire-board, just beyond the notch, he made a little pit with the point of his knife.

"Now, watch, girls, and we'll show you how to do it."

While one of the boys brought some punk, which had been scraped from a piece of dry pine, and set it down beside the fire-board, on a strip of dry bark, Skinny started his bow-drill. The spindle was held up straight, one end in the little hole which had been made in the fire-board and the other end in the hemlock knot. The hole in the knot had been soaped to make it slippery.

Standing with one foot on the fire-board, to hold it firm, and bearing down on the hemlock knot with his left hand, Skinny began to saw back and forth with the bow, the cord having been wound once around the spindle. That whirled the spindle and drilled the hole in the fire-board deeper. After a while the wood began to smoke and a dry powder which the whirling drill had worn off began to push out through the slot in the edge of the fire-board.

Bill, who had been watching for that, fanned it with his hand, until it glowed with fire; then lifted it to the punk, folded the strip of bark over it and waved it gently in the air, and soon it burst into flame.

"Now bring on your beefsteak," said Skinny, as

the delighted girls gathered around and the visitors clapped their hands.

“On second thought,” the teacher told us, “it will be better to postpone the beefsteak part until we get home. The exercises will close with a song by the entire school.”

CHAPTER IX

THE SIGN OF K

THE Sign said to meet in the cave at four o'clock. We found it chalked up all over town, one morning, — on our sidewalk, on the bridge, and in a lot of places.

As soon as I saw it in front of our house, I went over to Benny's to tell him about it. He had just found one on his sidewalk and his mother was making him scrub it off.

"It doesn't seem right," he told me, "to rub out the Sign but I'll catch it if I don't."

Just then we spied something white on the big tree. The big tree, as you probably know if you have read about the doings of the Band, stood in front of Marsh's yard, next to Benny Wade's on the north. It was a big one, all right, an elm. Benny and I together could not reach around it and its branches spread out almost to the other side of Park street. There was a hollow place in the tree, where you could put your hand in a hole, maybe

two feet deep. That hole in the tree was our secret postoffice, when we didn't want anybody to know what we were doing.

Benny and I ran over to the tree to see what the white thing was and found a sheet of paper tacked to the bark. On the paper was our Bandit Sign. The coffin in the center looked fierce.

Benny glanced up and down the street; there wasn't anybody in sight. Then, motioning for me to stand close behind him to keep the folks from seeing, if they should be looking out of some window, he reached one arm down into the hole and felt around.

"It's there, Pedro," he said, after a moment.

When he drew his arm out he held another sheet of paper in his hand. I made a grab for it but he snatched it away.

"Not here," said he. "They will see us. There is somebody coming down the street."

We ran into the yard and down to the barn, where we felt safe. On the paper, when we looked, we found another Sign, in black ink, and under the Sign were a big letter B and the word, "ware"; then B. H. K. in red ink, with blots of ink dripping down like blood.

"What's B. H. K ? " said Benny.

"Search me," I told him, "but it is something, and don't you forget it. Bold and Husky Knights, I guess."

Vacation time had come. School had let out some days before and we had the whole summer for play except when we had to work, and nobody had thought of anything big to do. Mr. Norton had told us to leave it to Skinny but even he had failed. Of course, we could think of plenty of fun — base ball, fishing, swimming and things like that — but I mean something big.

"It's going to be a whale of a meeting," I said, "there are so many Signs. I never saw so many. I'll bet they are all over town."

We hardly could wait until half past three, when it would be time to start. Benny came over to our house before three o'clock and we played catch in the back yard until it was time to go.

"Is the woodbox full, Pedro ? " he asked, anxiously, just as we were starting to climb the wall back of our garden, up into Blackinton's orchard.

"Running over the top," I told him. "I wasn't going to take any chances of being called back."

We were the first ones at the cave but pretty soon

Bill came, and then all the others in a bunch except Skinny. We didn't think anything of that at first, because you never can tell what Skinny is going to do. But when it was almost four o'clock we couldn't understand it.

"What is the meeting for?" somebody asked.

Nobody knew. All we knew was the Sign and that Skinny was late.

"It's one minute to four," said Bill, looking at his watch. "Skinny always makes a fuss when we are late. Let's take him out and duck him in the pool when he comes."

Before we could answer, we heard a wailing scream outside, faint-like, because it wasn't easy to hear in the cave, but we all heard it.

We scrambled through the opening, Bill being the first one out. I was right behind and heard him say, "Great snakes!" Then I saw what he was looking at.

At the top of the ravine, across from the cave, a sort of rocky shoulder stands out from the trees, in plain sight from the hole where we go in. There on that shoulder, with its arms folded, stood something, we didn't know what. It had on a black robe and a hat with a high peak, and its face was covered

with a black mask, with places cut out for its eyes and nose.

As we looked at it in wonder, huddled close together at the entrance, the Thing raised one arm and pointed to the sky.

"Caesar's ghost!" exclaimed Andy. "What is it?"

"Watch me hit it with a rock," muttered Bill.

He stooped and picked up a heavy, round stone out of the brook, took aim and began to draw back his arm. Before he could throw, the Thing tore the mask off its face and yelled,

"Don't be scared, fellers, it's only me."

That is who it was. We had kind of thought it might be Skinny but you never can tell. A minute later he crawled into the cave, with the rest of us, and took off his robes. It was exactly four o'clock.

"The meetin' will come to order," he said.

"I've thought of it," he told us, a little later. "It's something big, all right. Let's dress up in robes and hats like mine and go around with masks on, doing good deeds. We can call ourselves the 'B. H. K.'"

"What's that?" asked Bill. "Bad and Homely Kids?"



THE THING RAISED ONE ARM AND POINTED TO THE SKY.

"Bad and homely nothin' ! B. H. stands for Bob's Hill, doesn't it ? B. H. K. means Bob's Hill Klan."

"Clan begins with C," Hank told him.

"Betcher life, this one doesn't. It begins with K, and a big one."

"It would scare folks," objected Harry. "Skinny is bad enough but to have eight of us looking like Skinny did with his robes on, would scare folks half to death."

"Well, we can't help that, can we ? They would get over it, I guess. Come on, fellers, it will be great. We can have a secret grip and a pass-word and things like that. Nobody will know who are doing the deeds, because we'll be wearing our robes and masks."

"What would be the fun in doing anything, if folks couldn't know about it ? " asked Harry.

"I'm for it, anyhow," he went on quickly, for Skinny was looking at him fierce. "I have thought of a good grip, already."

"And I have thought of a motto," Skinny went on. "In order to join we'll have to swear 'to right all wrongs, protect the weak, and do good.' What do you say, fellers ? "

It sounded all right to us, almost like our Scout Law which says that a Scout must be helpful, only it doesn't say anything about wearing robes and masks while doing it. Bill told us that if we should try to right all wrongs there wouldn't be time enough left to practice for the ball game but he was for it, just the same.

"Guess what," said Benny. "K stands for cave, just as much as it does for clan. That makes it all the better."

We had to have several more meetings before we finally worked it all out and elected officers. We made Skinny the head one in it. He was captain of the Band, anyhow, and leader of the patrol; besides he thought of it. We called him "Supreme and Mighty Potentate," or S. M. P., for short. I was K. S. R., Keeper of the Secret Records. We didn't know what to call Bill, but Skinny said he could be the Factor Factotum Inkibus.

"But what is it, old Simp?" asked Bill.

"It's the biggest thing we've got. It will be up to you to keep your eyes peeled and tell us about the wrongs to be righted, the weak to be protected and the good deeds to be done."

"Great snakes!" said Bill. "I see my finish."

“Where do you get that ‘Simp’ stuff?” Skinny went on. “I’ll put a head on the first feller that calls me Simp.”

“That is what you said,” Bill told him, “S. M. P.”

That is why Skinny changed his title to Most High and Mighty Potentate — M. H. M. P. He said it sounded bigger.

I am not going to tell about our grip and password and things like that. They are secrets.

“I can think of one good deed, right off the bat,” Bill told us, after we had talked a long time. “The Factor Factotum Inkibus needs food. Let’s go home and eat.”

The hardest part about the B. H. K. business was getting robes and hats, on the quiet. We couldn’t seem to do it, without telling our folks. I rummaged around in the attic a long time, trying to find some old stuff that I could use.

Everything seemed to be there except what I wanted. As fast as I had looked at one thing or into some box or trunk, I put it back out of the way, so that I needn’t paw it over again. When I finally had gone through everything without finding what I was after, the old attic was in better shape than it had been in a long time.

Mother couldn't understand it. She looked at me funny-like when I came down.

"Why all this industry?" she asked. "You are not sick, John, are you?"

"I was seeing what I could find," I told her. I didn't want to say anything more because Skinny had told us to keep the Klan business a secret, even from our folks.

"What were you trying to find?"

I knew I'd have to tell her before she would let up and that it might as well be first as last.

"It is a secret," I said, "but I'll tell you if you will promise not to say anything about it."

"I never have seen an attic yet that didn't contain at least one secret," she laughed. "I am surprised that you couldn't find it. Anyhow, I'll promise. That is, if it should be all right not to say anything."

Then I told her about the B. H. K. and our going around to right wrongs and do good deeds, and when she seemed real interested I asked her to fix me up with a robe and hat.

"One could do good deeds without a robe," she said, "but I will make you one, just the same, and I'll keep the secret."

"We'll use Pedro's barn," Skinny decided, at one of our meetings. "It is almost in the center of town and close to everything. We can keep our robes there. That can be our meeting place, when we start out to do some good deed. The cave is too far away. Only we'll need another Sign. A circle means to meet at the cave. Pedro, think up a Sign that means your barn."

"We don't need any barn Sign," I told him. "All we need is the day of the month and the hour of the meeting, and the letter K. That is Sign enough. When we see that we'll know there is to be a meeting at our barn. Any time we want to meet at the cave instead of our barn, all we'll have to do will be to draw a circle around it and that will mean the cave."

"The Keeper of the Secret Records has a great head," said Skinny. "Only we'll have to have some blood dripping down."

That is what we decided to do — the Sign part, I mean, not the blood. We met in the barn that very evening, each of us bringing his robe and hat. Mother came out, when she found what was going on and helped us get into our things.

"You are a fearful looking sight," said she, when she had finished and we all stood in a row, with

peaked hats, black robes and black masks on. "I'd hate to meet you alone after dark."

"What is the first good deed you are going to do?" she asked. "That is, if it is not too much of a secret."

"We are going over to scare Mr. Norton," Skinny told her.

"That doesn't appeal to me as a good deed exactly," she laughed, "but I can stand it if he can. See that you don't land in the lock-up."

It was getting dark when we started out and up the street, carrying our robes under our arms.

"Keep your eyes peeled, Bill," whispered Skinny, "and if you see any wrongs to be righted, sing out."

"I hope he has ice cream," said Bill. "I could right that in two jerks of a lamb's tail."

We reached Mr. Norton's home without anything happening; then put on our robes and masks and rang the bell. He came to the door himself and stood there speechless when he saw the B. H. K. He was one surprised scoutmaster.

At a motion from Skinny, we all groaned and pointed at him; then said "Beware!"

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Mr. Norton. "Somebody must have left the gate open."

Skinny motioned again. "Prepare to meet thy doom," we growled, making our voices as deep as we could.

"Come inside," said he. "I'd rather meet it in the parlor than any other place I know, unless it is the dining room."

"That is fine, fellows," he told us, after he had heard about the Klan business. "You will be able to do a lot of good and have fun doing it. I think you will find that in making others happy you will be very happy yourselves. That is the way it usually works out. Who thought of it?"

"There is no need to ask," he laughed, for Skinny was beginning to get real chesty. "I told you that Skinny would be able to think of something, if you would give him time. Bill, what did you say you were, the what-ibus?"

"Inkibus. Factor Factotum Inkibus."

He gave a long, low whistle. "You astonish me. I haven't any title but perhaps I may be able to help you a little. I have something in mind now but want to look into it a little farther before I say anything about it. Perhaps Mr. Inkibus will drop into my office tomorrow morning."

CHAPTER X

ROBED IN BLACK

WE had a late dinner the next day. It was half past twelve o'clock before we sat down. My place at the table faces one of the windows which look out upon Phillips' driveway.

Before we had finished eating, I saw an eye peeking in at one corner of the bottom pane, toward the street. As I stared at it, the eye winked and another eye appeared at the corner of the opposite pane, toward Phillips' barn. Then a hand was waved slowly up and down, with the fingers in a certain position, which only those who belong to the B. H. K. know about. If I put down what it was some member of the Gingham Ground Gang might see it and spoil everything.

"John," said my mother, "what in the world are you staring at? Why don't you eat your dinner?"

Before I could answer there came three low whistles, not like any whistling you ever heard. I can't tell about that either, for it's a secret, but I

knew what it was, all right. It was the signal of the Klan. When we hear that, we have to leave whatever we are doing and follow, "even to the ends of the earth," Skinny says, but, of course, the earth can't have any ends, being round.

The Keeper of the Secret Records looked hungrily at the pie; then started for the door.

"John Alexander," said my mother, "come back here this minute and finish your dinner. I haven't heard anybody excuse you."

It is hard for a fellow to know what to do at times like that but she had put the Alexander part in, so it seemed best to go back to my seat. Then it came again — the signal. Mother heard it that time.

"Is it —" she began.

"Sh-h," I warned her, putting my fingers to my lips. "Hadn't I better go and see what it is?"

"Well, maybe you'd better," said she, "and in case you should find some poor, hungry orphan out there, you might take along a couple of those doughnuts."

At the back door, on the edge of the garden, stood the Most High and Mighty Potentate and the Factor Factotum Inkibus.

"We are going to have a meetin'," whispered

Skinny. "The others will be here in a few minutes."

"Go on out to the barn," I told him. "I'll finish my dinner in a jiffy."

"Was it an orphan?" asked Mother, when I went in without the doughnuts.

"I don't know about the orphan part," I said, "but it was hungry and it was twins."

"The meetin' will come to order," shouted Skinny, a little later. "The F. F. I. has a message for us."

"I saw Mr. Norton this morning, like he told me to," Bill began, "and what do you think? Old Ezra Bowen fell and broke his leg yesterday. Mr. Norton says that his hay crop will be ruined, if it gets wet. There is a rain coming and nobody to put in the hay."

"Here's a chance for the B. H. K., fellers," added Skinny. "Let's get in his hay for him."

"He hollered at me once when I was going through his yard," objected Hank.

"What if he did? I'll bet you were hooking his apples."

"I wasn't, either. I only took one. It wasn't ripe enough to eat, anyhow."

In going up over Bob's Hill to Peck's Falls, we

have to cross one end of Ezra Bowen's farm, and sometimes he doesn't like it very well; but we can't help it. We can't jump across, can we? Besides, Peck's brook, after it gets through falling, flows down through his farm, at the bottom of a rocky ravine. It is the place where Skinny tracked a bear one winter, only it turned out to be Jake Yost with his boots on his feet wrong, instead of a bear. The tracks looked like bear tracks, just the same — but I told about that once in the doings of the Band. That ravine is a good place to play in and you can't get to it from Bob's Hill, without climbing a stone wall and walking across the farm.

“You told me to keep my eyes peeled for wrongs to be righted and good deeds to be done,” said Bill, “and here is a chance to do both. You fellows have hooked Mr. Bowen's apples; you know you have. That's a wrong to be righted, isn't it? Now he has fallen and broken his leg and can't get in his hay. That's a good deed to be done. That hay is going in, if Skinny and I have to put it in alone. Mr. Bowen is worrying himself sick over it; Mr. Norton says so.”

That settled it. When Skinny and Bill both are for a thing, you may as well give in, first as last

The more we thought about it, the more we wanted to do it, but how to do it, without the folks finding it out, was a hard one.

"We can sneak up through the orchard," said Harry, "and put our robes on in Plunkett's woods. Folks will think we are going up to Peck's Falls."

"Let's do it at night," said Skinny. "Our robes and masks would look fierce after dark."

We decided to meet that very night, after the moon had come up. Before that it would be too dark.

I went to bed with my clothes on that night, except my shoes, of course, and was so excited I hardly could sleep. The moon had come up at nine o'clock, the night before, so we knew it would rise about ten. By eleven it would be shining bright, making the fields almost as light as day beyond Bob's Hill, away from the trees.

When the clock in the Baptist church steeple struck eleven, I slid out of bed and, grabbing my shoes, crept to the stairs. Skinny had wanted to throw his rope up through the window for me to slide down but I was afraid he would wake up the folks.

I slid down the banisters instead, the stairs

being so creaky; then tiptoed through the hall and carefully opened the door, on to the back stoop.

There was no sound except somebody snoring, and I knew that I was safe. In another moment I was out by the barn. The other boys soon came, one after another, until all were there.

A few minutes later eight figures, robed in black and wearing peaked hats and black masks, climbed the stone wall back of our garden into Blackinton's orchard and silently went up through the night to the top of Bob's Hill.

There we stood for a few minutes and looked around. It was the queerest sight I ever saw, Skinny and the others, in their black robes and masks, armed with pitchforks, there on top of Bob's Hill. I'd have been scared, if I had not known who they were. As it was, it gave me a creepy feeling, and I knew that I must look the same way to them.

To the left and a little farther on, was a dark blotch, which we knew was Plunkett's woods. Beyond, old Greylock lifted up his great shoulders through the moonlight, looking kind of dim and far away but seeming to beckon to us, just the same.

On we marched, making hardly a sound. Nobody

felt like saying anything, for it was quiet up there in the night, when everybody else was asleep — quiet and scary. We didn't stop again, until we had reached Mr. Bowen's barn.

"I hope he hasn't a dog, or anything," whispered Benny, anxiously.

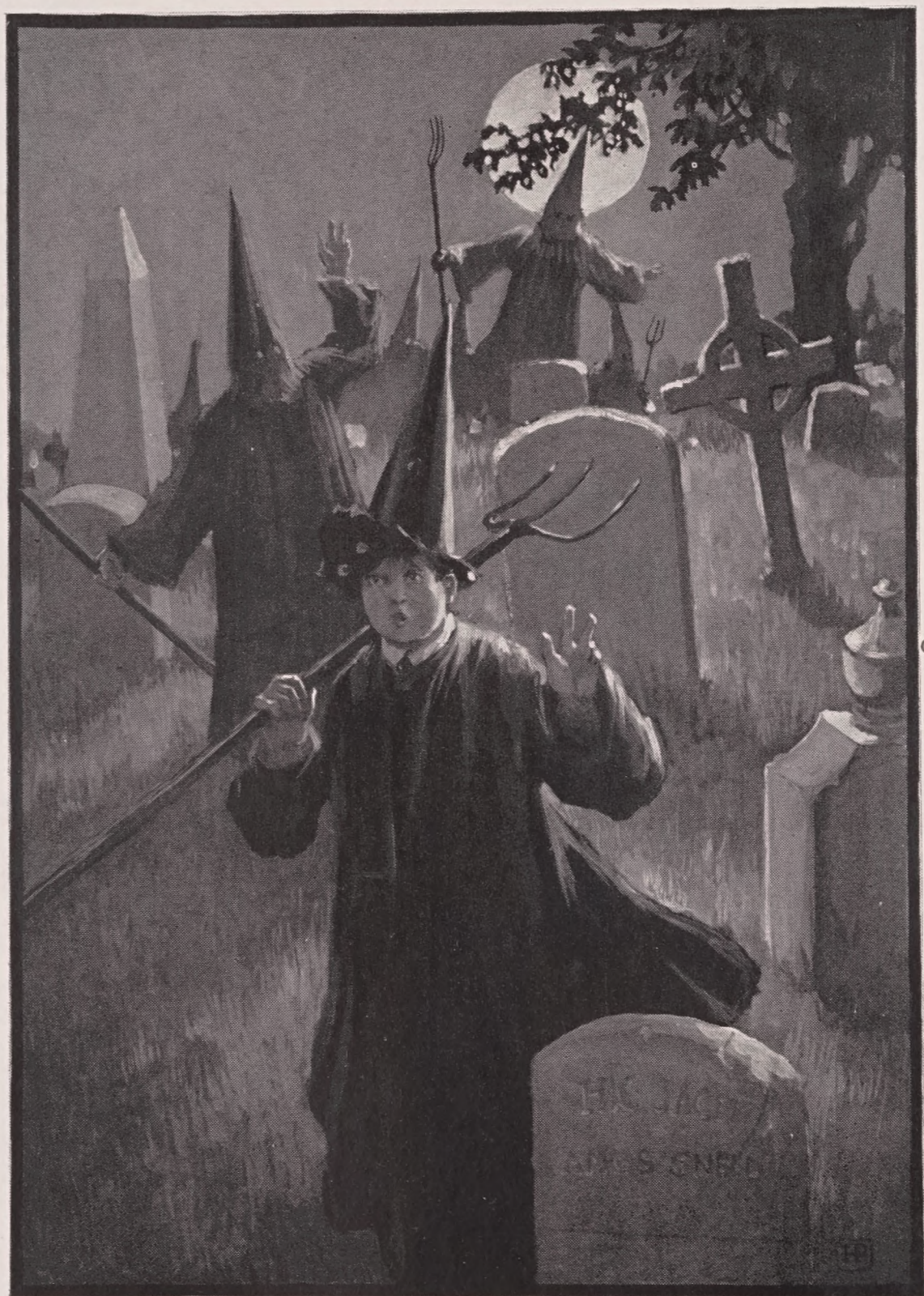
"He hasn't," Skinny told him. "Bill and I came up this afternoon to look things over. There is the wagon, and the horses are in that shed. We are so far from the house I don't believe they will hear us, if we are quiet."

It took quite a while to hitch up the team but at last we drove out into the hay field, where the hay had been raked up into little piles, which gave out a sweet smell when we lifted great forkfuls up on the wagon, just as we had seen the men do a lot of times.

Nobody need ever tell us that farming is easy. All through the night we worked — in our robes at first and then without them. Soon we began to peel off one thing after another, until there wasn't much left.

"Great snakes!" groaned Bill. "There are a million tons; I 'most know there are."

But loading the wagon was a picnic, compared



"GEE, FELLERS, IT'S THE CEMETERY!"

with unloading the hay through the barn door into the mow. It was dark in there except at the very door and we didn't dare have a light, for fear it would be seen from the house. And hot? Say! If you never mowed away hay in a barn, on a hot night, you don't know anything about it.

I don't know how we ever could have done it, if we hadn't stopped to rest after each load and bathe our arms and faces in the cool water of Peck's brook, where it pours through the ravine. After one of those times Skinny gave each of us a sandwich which he had brought from home. I thought he had looked bigger than usual under his robe. Nobody else had brought anything to eat. Those sandwiches tasted like more.

"How about some green apples?" asked Hank, gazing wistfully toward the orchard. "They would be better than nothing."

We all looked at the Most High and Mighty Potentate.

"Fellers," said he. "This 'ere Klan is to right all wrongs, and it is wrong to go hungry; betcher life!"

We were through at last, and the horses were back in the barn. It had been thundering for some time

and we knew that the expected rain was coming soon, although the moon still was shining and we could see.

Then, as we turned to go, the wind arose, and, all of a sudden, the moon was blotted out and we were left there in pitch darkness. It was lucky that it hadn't happened before, for we should have had to stop work and let the hay spoil.

We decided to go home by the road, instead of crossing the fields to Bob's Hill. Skinny said that it would be easier finding our way and it wouldn't be so lonesome in the dark, on account of the houses. But he forgot the cemetery, and so did all of us; we were too tired to think of anything.

The West road runs north and south past the Bowen farm and close to Peck's Falls woods. Near the old Quaker Meeting House, a street from the village, turning off from Park street toward the west, runs into the West road, while the West road itself goes on toward the north and up through what is called the Notch. The Notch is a high valley between two mountain ridges, like a big notch cut there. If you ever are in that part of the country, you ought to ride up through it. It's great.

The cemetery extends clear to the West road, and the old Quaker Meeting House stands, with boarded windows, at the west end. That is the oldest part of the cemetery, so old that many of the graves are not marked and you can't tell where they are. It dates back to the days of the Revolution, I guess.

We had reached the corner and turned east toward the village, before we thought of the cemetery, and we didn't think of it then, at first. It was too dark to see much. Just then we heard somebody hurrying down the road, sort of singing to himself.

"Great snakes!" said Bill. "Here comes some guy and he'll give the whole thing away. Don't let him see us. Let's get over into the field until he has passed."

It wasn't easy to climb the wall, with our robes on, but we were over in a jiffy, stumbling around inside; then we heard a cry of horror from Skinny.

"Gee, fellers, it's the cemetery! Get out of this quick, or you are goners."

That is what it was. Before we knew it, we had wandered in among the graves, in the night time! It would have taken a speedy ghost to catch Bill. I couldn't catch him and I am a good runner. The rest of us were not far behind.

The eight of us jumped up on the wall at about the same time, and stood there in a row, with Skinny a little in front, for a second. Our robes were flapping in the wind and we were holding our pitchforks with the tines up, so that they would not catch on anything. Then, just as the man was passing, we jumped.

We hadn't seen the man, when we stood there; we were too frightened. But we heard him as soon as we had jumped. I guess they must have heard him down in the village. The clouds had thinned across the moon for a moment, so that he could see us, standing on the graveyard wall, in black robes and peaked hats, and with pitchforks raised in the air.

It paralyzed him. Then we jumped, seemingly right at him. Say ! Even Bill couldn't have hollered like that man did. He gave one awful shriek and went tearing down the road like mad.

"Lawd hab mussy," we could hear him yelling, over and over again. "Lawd hab mussy. Debbil gwine cotch me, suah."

"It is Sam Cooper !" exclaimed Harry, in disgust. "And I wanted to get my hair cut tomorrow."

Sam Cooper is our barber and almost the only colored man in the village.

"He'll be too scared to cut hair for a week," laughed Skinny. "Gee-whilikins, did you hear him yell? Bill isn't in it with Sam."

After that we were not so afraid ourselves, especially as pretty soon we had passed the cemetery and were turning into Park street. Bill wanted to give one yell and scare somebody else but we wouldn't let him.

"What we want," we told him, "is to get home without having anybody see us or hear us. Sam Cooper will tell the whole town; you see if he doesn't."

There wasn't anybody on the street and not a light in any of the houses. Benny was the first to turn in and we waited out in front, until we saw him climb through a window. I was next, and soon I was tiptoeing up the stairs to my room, so tired I hardly could crawl.

"Mum's the word," Skinny had whispered, when I turned into the yard.

CHAPTER XI

"DEVILS IN THE CEMETERY"

"JOHN ALEXANDER SMITH, are you going to lie in bed all day ? This is the third time I have called you this morning. We are all through breakfast."

The Keeper of the Secret Records roused up out of a sound sleep and made a moaning noise to show that he had heard and was wide awake. I knew that it was no use; I should have to get up. Mother never speaks my full name that way unless she means business.

"Make it snappy, boy," came Dad's voice, floating up the stairway into my room.

That settled it. With many a groan I crawled out and into my clothes, only a few hours after I had gone to bed. Snappy ! Every muscle ached and hurt when I moved and there were big blisters on my hands. Mother could see that something was the matter, although I tried to act as if nothing had happened.

"Are you sick, John ? " she asked, anxiously.

“I don’t feel so very well,” I told her, and it was true. “I guess maybe I played too hard yesterday.”

“It is climbing that hill,” she said to Father. “I believe the boys climb up and down that hill a dozen times a day. It wears me out to think of it.”

Dad gave a little laugh. You see he used to be a boy himself. “Better cut it down to ten times, John,” said he. “Twelve times are too many. It would be a terrible thing if the secretary of the Band should wear his legs out.”

“I think that I’ll go up to Ezra Bowen’s,” he told us, a little later. “The old man has broken his leg, right in the midst of his harvest. It is pretty tough. It will cheer him up a little to see a friend and maybe we can do something to help. It is almost impossible to hire anybody, even when you have the money, and Ezra hasn’t any more than the law allows.”

“John,” he added, as he went out the door, “I have some work for you this morning. I want you to carry that wood into the shed and pile it up neatly. It ought to have been put in yesterday before the rain.”

Can you beat it? And I didn’t dare say a word, for fear he would ask me what I had been doing.

Benny came over after a little and I made him help me, although he was just as lame and stiff as I was—lamer, if anything.

We both felt better after we had worked a while. When you have something to do that is hard and that you don't like, the way to do is to pitch in and get it over with. That is what Mr. Norton says and that is what we did. It was hard at the start, before Benny came. Mother had a rug hanging on a line in the back yard and it hid the woodpile from the house. It seemed as if I couldn't move at first, and I sat there behind the rug, rapping two sticks together, to sound as if I was piling wood to beat the band. It worked fine, until Mother came out to see the rug and caught me at it.

When Father came home just before dinner time, the wood was all piled and the Klan were having a meeting in the barn. Skinny wanted to think of some wrong to be righted.

"Great snakes, Skinny!" Bill was saying. "No more haying for little Willie. Gee, I hardly could stick my fork into a pancake this morning at breakfast."

Just then Father drove into the yard and we could hear him talking to Mother under the window.

“How did you find Ezra?” she asked.

“Feeling pretty bad. It is tough and no mistake, to be laid up that way, and right in the midst of the busy season. To make matters worse, somebody stole his hay last night.”

“Stole his hay! Out of the barn?”

“No, out of the field. He had it all raked up and ready to put in the barn, when he broke his leg; was intending to put it in yesterday. Some rascal heard of his accident, I suppose, and knew that the old man couldn’t get out of bed. He carried off the whole crop, slick and clean, and used Ezra’s own team to haul it. The family didn’t know a thing about it until Emily happened to look out toward the field this morning, when she was getting breakfast, and saw that it was gone. It gave them a shock.”

“Of all things! What won’t folks steal next?”

“Yes, Ezra is feeling pretty bad about it, although he says that the rain would have spoiled the hay, anyhow. That crop meant a great deal to him. It will go hard with the chap who did it, if we can find out who it was.”

The folks went into the house after that and we couldn’t hear any more but we had heard enough. We didn’t know whether to be mad or tickled.

"Stole his hay!" snorted Skinny. "We wouldn't do such a thing. I've a notion to go up there and put it back in the field."

"You'll have to do it without the help of Mr. Inkibus," Bill told him, feeling of his muscles. "It makes me sick almost to see Pedro's hay."

"Then we've got to let Ezra Bowen know that it's in the barn. He'd find it out soon enough, if he could go up into the mow."

"How are we going to do it, without giving ourselves away?"

"Leave it to Mr. Norton," said Harry. "He got us into this mess, and now he can get us out of it. We can stop at his house and tell him on the way home. He goes to dinner about this time."

That seemed the right thing to do. We didn't want anybody to know that we had done it; but what is the use of a good deed when the man you do it to doesn't know that it has been done?

"If we start right away," I told them, "I'll have time to go with you."

Mr. Norton almost laughed himself sick, when we told him what we had done and that Ezra Bowen thought his hay had been stolen; but it wasn't any laughing matter, just the same. Folks were feeling

pretty mad about it and there was no telling what would happen.

“Leave it to me, fellows,” he said, wiping his eyes. “I was going up there this afternoon, anyhow, and I can fix it. I worried a great deal about that hay, when I heard it raining along toward morning, and I surely did not dream that you boys had it in the barn, out of harm’s way. You got ahead of me that time. I had planned to go up there to-day with you and help. I couldn’t get away yesterday. But why in the night? Why didn’t you do the job yesterday afternoon?”

“Yes, and have the whole town know about it,” said Skinny, “and know who it was who did it. You can’t wear a robe and mask when you pitch hay, believe me.”

“Mum’s the word, Mr. Norton,” we called, when we were leaving.

“Oh, I’ll keep your secret, boys. It was good work and I am proud of you.”

We didn’t know how he was going to fix it but he did, all right. Father came home at night full of news.

“The strangest thing has happened,” said he. “Ezra Bowen’s hay wasn’t stolen, after all. Some-

body had put it in the barn. Whoever it was, must have worked a good part of the night; there was a bunch of it. I went out to the barn and saw it myself."

"For mercy's sake!" exclaimed Mother. "I never heard of such a thing. Who did it?"

"Nobody knows; but wasn't it a wonderful thing to do? There was the old man, bed-ridden and his crop about to be ruined, and not one of us old fossils in the village had sense or decency enough to help him out. Some neighbor, most likely after a hard day's work on his own farm, goes over there in the dead of the night — secretly — mind you — and put that hay in the barn. Ezra says that it made his leg almost well when he heard about it.

"I don't know who did it but I, for one, am proud to know that we have such folks living near us. Let it be a lesson to you, John — a lesson in thoughtfulness and helpfulness. We are all passing through, in this long journey we call life. We don't know where we came from or where we are going, and most of us seem to be trying to push the other fellow off the path. Then, once in a while, something happens like this thing at Bowen's, that gives us new courage and new inspiration,"

Mr. Norton was right, when he said that in making other people happy we should be happy ourselves. It made me feel good clear through when Dad was saying those things, although it made me laugh, because he didn't know that he was talking about me and the others. I hardly could wait until after supper, I was in such a hurry to tell the boys about it.

But when I went out to look for them, as soon as I could get away from the table, I heard something else which made me forget all about it. Sam Cooper, the barber, was talking to the marshal, out on Park street.

“Yes, sah, Mr. Michael,” he was saying. “Ah seen 'em as plain as Ah see you this minute — a dozen of 'em, mebbly twenty, all in black, like you see in picters, and a little in front of the others was one big debbil. Ah could see his long tail, with a bahb on the end, like on a fishhook, a-pintin' at me.”

“What were you doing there, at that time of night ? ”

“Ah was just comin' down the road, past the grave ya'd, kind of singin' to myself, to keep the ghosteyes away.”

“Did you say they carried forks ? ”

"Yes, sah; eb'ry debbil had a pitch fo'k — lookin' for sinnahs, Ah reckon."

"Well, they found one, when they spotted you, Sam."

"Yes, sah; yes, sah. An' they had on black robes, what flopped in the win'. They heard me comin' down the road an' didn't even stop to take off what they was weahing on their faces to keep off the heat. The debbil neahly cotched ol' Sam, that time, for suah."

"Say, Sam," said the marshal, "what is your brand and where do you get it? Those devils never came out of a cemetery. They came out of a bottle."

"No, sah. Ah ain't seen no bottle. Ah is not a drinkin' man, Mr. Michael."

"Then all I've got to say," the marshal told him, "is to keep away from the farmers' chickens after this, or the devil will get you and no mistake."

"Mr. Michael," said Sam, "Ah ain't 'mitting Ah was aftah chickens, but if Ah was, nevah again, sah, nevah again. Ah knows when Ah has had enough."

Sam Cooper told that story all over town to everybody who would listen. The whole village was buzzing with it. The woman who came next day

to help Mother with her work couldn't talk of anything else.

“Sure, Mrs. Smith, there were fifty of thim,” said she, “regular divils, like they had slipped out of a pitcher book. They had pointed tails, ivry divil of them, and flames were comin' out of their nostrils. They rose up out of the graves, still carrying the forks they had been shoveling the poor sinners in with — God rist their souls. It must have been terrible. Sure, I'd 'a' died a thousand deaths if I had seen thim. It's a warnin', Mrs. Smith. Something awful is going to happen, sure as you're born.”

“Nonsense !” said Mother. “The man was drunk and seeing things.”

“They say he is not a drinking man, at all. He was just passing the cemetery, on his way home from the country, whin there came a great flame of light, and out stepped all the imps of Satan. They 'most got him, he says. If he hadn't had the prisince of mind to make the holy sign of the cross, they would have had him on their forks. Whin he did that, they groaned in despair and wint back where they belong.”

“It was dark. How could he see them or know there were fifty ?”

"Sure, Oime tellin' ye. Fire was coming out of their noses, making it as bright as day, and there they were glaring at him, waving their tails and shaking their forks. God have mercy on us, Mrs. Smith. It's awful wicked we must be to have such things happen."

"How did you say they were dressed?"

"They had on black robes, he says, and peaked hats and wore black masks on their faces. Iviry divil of thim was carrying a pitchfork."

When she said that, Mother gave a little start and looked at me. I could tell what she was thinking about; she had helped make those black robes and peaked hats. I winked at her; I couldn't help it.

"John Alexander Smith," she exclaimed, "come with me into the next room."

"Now," she went on, after the door had been closed, "what have you boys been up to? Tell me, instantly. You didn't get those blisters on your hands working for me, I know."

I had to tell. She knew about a part of it, anyhow, so it didn't make so much difference. I thought she would laugh her head off, when I told her about the cemetery part, how scared we were and how Sam Cooper yelled and ran. But when I had

finished, her face was shining and there were tears in her eyes, as she hugged me tight.

“ I should have worried,” she told me, “ if I had known you were up there in the night, and I think now it would have been better to have done your good deed in the day time; but it was a splendid thing to do and I am proud of every one of you. How did you happen to think of it ? ”

“ Mr. Norton told us about it. He said there was a mighty good deed waiting for somebody to do, and that is what the B. H. K. are for, you know.”

“ That blessed man ! ” she cried. “ He has been the best thing that ever came into your life, John, he and the Boy Scout business. It will be a great loss when he goes away.”

“ You have stirred up the whole village,” she laughed. “ First came the story of stealing Ezra Bowen’s hay; then that it wasn’t stolen at all but put in the barn, and now, the devils with their pitchforks. We haven’t had so much to talk about this year. It is too good to keep.”

“ You promised not to tell,” I warned her.

“ I know it and I am not going to but it will be hard to keep still, with everybody talking about it and such ridiculous stories going around. The Klan

are not going to have a meeting this afternoon, by any chance, are they ? ”

“ I shouldn't wonder. Why? ”

“ Oh, nothing — except that if they should happen to come around, you will find a pan of fresh doughnuts in the pantry.”

“ Laugh, if you want to, Mrs. Smith,” I heard the woman in the kitchen say, a little later, “ but somethin' terrible is going to happen, just the same. It's a warnin'.”

CHAPTER XII

MOTHER DOES A GOOD DEED

THERE was a lot of talk about the devils in the cemetery; it made us laugh. Most people thought that Sam Cooper, the man who saw us, had been drinking. If he had, he will never drink again; he will be afraid to. Others said that probably he saw something, maybe a bush waving in the wind, and, coming home in the night past the cemetery, imagined the rest.

Anyhow, we thought it would be better not to wear our robes for a while, until things had quieted down a little. There wasn't any use in letting folks find out who was doing it; that would spoil all the fun. Besides, we couldn't think of any more good deeds. I mean big ones, the kind that would take the whole Band to do them.

There were plenty of little ones. Mrs. Barker, across the street from our house, wanted all kinds of errands done, and Mr. Norton had us do a whole lot of little things for Ezra Bowen, in the day time,

without our masks on. It made Mr. Bowen like us first rate and once he told us that we might have some apples when they were ripe. But he didn't find out about the hay. We heard him talking about it several times and wishing that he knew who it was, so that he could thank him.

You can't think of good deeds very well when Fourth of July is coming; there is too much to do getting ready and too many other things to think about. There is something about Fourth of July that is different from every other day of the year. It isn't the noise and things like that, although they help. It isn't any one thing at all but all the things put together, I guess, that make a boy feel different from on any other day, even Christmas. Father says that it is the one day in the whole year when he has money to burn.

Mother didn't have to call me on Fourth of July morning. There was so much to be done and so much fun in sight that I couldn't sleep, and it was just the same with the other boys. There was the cannon to be fired off by the big boys on Bob's Hill, at four o'clock in the morning. That would have wakened us up, if nothing else did. Then there was the big bonfire to light on the hill. We always have

a bonfire; we get it all ready the night before — tar barrels, drygoods boxes and things like that. And the church bells had to be rung. It wouldn't be Fourth of July without those things. And they only started the day. There was even more to be done after breakfast.

On the day before the Fourth we found Willie Graham crying. Willie lives on Park street but he doesn't belong to the Band or the Patrol. He is too young. We were on our way to our barn, with the last of our firecrackers and rockets and such things. We had been buying them for weeks, a few at a time, and hiding them in our barn.

"What's the matter, Willie?" asked Skinny. "Who has been picking on you? The Kl—I mean the Band — will put a head on him. Won't we, fellers?"

"My father won't give me any money to buy firecrackers with," sobbed Willie, "and he'll lick me if I ask him again."

It made Skinny mad. He thinks a lot of Fourth of July, on account of his ancestors having fought in the Battle of Bunker Hill. There were thirteen of them and one was killed, which Hank says was a good thing, thirteen being an unlucky number.

"Pedro," he whispered, "are the robes put away where nobody can see them?"

"You come with us, Willie," he said, when I had told him that they were all packed away in a chest, waiting for the next time.

It surprised us a little, Willie not belonging to the B. H. K., but we didn't say anything. It couldn't do much harm, anyhow. There wasn't anything to see except some old chairs and a table, our Scout motto, "Be Prepared," that Mr. Norton had given us, and a lot of hay.

It made Willie dry his eyes, just the same, and wonder what was going to happen.

"Fellers," Skinny began, after we had gone upstairs and the meeting had come to order, "tomorrow will be the Fourth of July."

"Tell us something new," said Bill. "We heard about that yesterday."

Skinny looked around for his hatchet to pound with but couldn't find it. He looked fierce at Bill and went on,

"Fourth of July is the day when the United States of America was born. It was the day on which they signed the What-you-call-it and rang Liberty Bell and shot off firecrackers, to beat the

band. That was long ago and ever since that time we've kept on ringing bells and firing firecrackers on the Fourth of July. It is for our country. It wouldn't be right not to do it."

"I read it in a book," he added, turning to Willie.

"I know it," Willie told him. "I had some torpedoes last Fourth."

"Torpedoes!" snorted Skinny. "You throw one on the floor or against a wall, and maybe it goes off and maybe it doesn't. Torpedoes are better than nothing at all but, betcher life, they were not throwing torpedoes at the Battle of Bunker Hill. Didn't the Americans wait behind a fence until they could see the whites of the enemy's eyes? And then did they throw torpedoes at them? Say, did they?"

"I — I don't know," Willie began, not feeling sure what he ought to say; then seeing Skinny scowl, "I don't think they did."

"Fellers," whispered Skinny, drawing us to one side, "here is a chance to do a good deed and right a wrong at the same time. What do you say?"

"We haven't on our masks and robes, Skinny," said Benny. "It is too late to put them on now; he would see us."

"Well, let's do it, anyhow. Let's give him a part

of our firecrackers. It's for the Fourth of July," he urged. "It's for our country."

When Willie left, his pockets were full of firecrackers and he was the happiest boy in the village except Skinny, maybe.

"Keep 'em out of sight until tomorrow," he warned. "Then give 'em Bunker Hill."

When I told Mother about it afterward, she was madder than Skinny had been.

"The old skinflint!" she cried. "I don't believe that he ever was a boy. That is the meanest man in town, John. It makes me sick to look at him. He has mortgages on half the farms around here, and God help the poor people who can't pay. That is what ails Ezra Bowen more than his broken leg. He is afraid that old Graham will take his farm away from him. He would have done it too, if you boys hadn't saved his hay crop, and maybe he will, anyhow, if some of the rest of us do not get busy."

We never had liked that man, Graham, but the mortgage business was news to me. He was mean, just like Mother said. I have seen him kick a dog half-way across the street, just for the fun of kicking him. We'd be put out of the Boy Scouts, if we did such a thing.

Nothing more happened for several days. Fourth of July had come and gone, and we were getting ready to play our ball game with the Gingham Ground Gang — I mean Eagle patrol. Then things began to happen so fast they made our heads swim.

They started one evening, when Benny and I were going up Park street, on our way home. One house stood almost on the street line and Benny gave the doorbell a ring when we passed.

“Let’s do it to every house on the street,” he said, for he was feeling full of fun.

We started in, stepping to the front door of every house. We hadn’t gone far when we could see the folks come out and look around, then go in again.

When we had come to Mr. Graham’s house Benny rang the bell and I gave the door a kick, for just then I thought about Ezra Bowen and how he might lose his farm. Two houses further on we heard the Graham door open with a bang and, down the steps, he jumped after us, carrying a club.

We didn’t stop to do any more bell ringing after that. The man was crazy mad.

“Run !” I shouted to Benny, grabbing him by one hand, for his legs were shorter than mine and he couldn’t get over the ground so fast.

We did some great running that time but old Graham's legs were still longer and he gained on us with every jump. It wasn't so very far to our house but I thought we never should get there. Nearer and nearer he came.

"I've got you, this time," he shouted, swinging his club.

It missed us, for just then we ducked and dodged through our gate, almost winded and panting with fright. It seemed as if I never had been so scared in my life.

Mother looked surprised when two frantic boys rushed past her into the kitchen and crawled back of the stove out of sight but she didn't have time to say anything. Just then we could hear a man's steps on the back stoop. And there was Graham ! He was coming right in after us.

Say ! You ought to have seen my mother then. A bright red spot came into each cheek, as she planted herself in the doorway and looked at him. We were peeking from behind the stove, getting ready to dash out the back door into the garden and up on Bob's Hill. It is a wonder that he didn't shrivel up and catch fire.

"You coward !" she said.

It was enough, too. The man stopped right there and seemed to be going to tell her what we had done. She wouldn't listen.

"John," said she, but without taking her eyes off the man. "Run across the street and get the marshal. We'll put this fellow where he belongs."

He tried again to tell her what we had done but it wasn't any use. She wouldn't let him speak. She was thinking of Ezra Bowen and the mortgage on his farm; not of us.

"Don't speak to me!" she cried. "And get off the place. I don't want to breathe the same air."

But I didn't go across any street. And have him catch me in front of the house? Not much! He slunk away after that and we didn't see him again for some time but I was careful to keep on Benny's side of the street. There isn't any use in taking chances.

Mother wouldn't talk about it very much. She seemed to feel kind of ashamed of getting mad that way; I couldn't see why. Father said that I ought to tell Graham I was sorry I rang his bell and wouldn't do it again.

"It doesn't make any difference how mean a man Graham is," he told me. "You can't afford to be

mean just because somebody else is. I want you to remember that, John, as long as you live. It was a mean thing to ring his bell and kick his door, and I want you to go over there and apologize for it. If he touches you, the law will take care of him."

"It will do the child a lot of good, after he has been beaten black and blue!" said Mother, beginning to get mad again.

"Now, Ma," he began. "You know he ought to apologize."

"Don't you Ma me," she blazed. "If John goes over there to apologize, his father will have to go with him to protect him. That man had murder in his eyes when he came over here the other day, if anyone ever did."

"I know what Graham is," Dad went on, "and I don't want my boy to grow up into that kind of a man. It isn't necessary for John to go over there. Under the circumstances, perhaps it would not be wise. But the boy ought to do the right thing."

"John," said he, turning to me, "sit down and write a note of apology to Mr. Graham. Let's have no more talk about it."

It was one of the hardest things I ever did, especially as I didn't feel so very sorry.

"You ought to have had a rope and lassoed him," said Skinny, when he heard about it. "Betcher life, old Graham doesn't chase me."

But he was mad, just the same. Then I told him what Mother had said about the mortgages on half the farms in town and about what ailed Ezra Bowen.

"Fellers," he said, "we've got to earn some money. That's all there is about it."

"We can't earn several thousand dollars," I told him.

"That's so. But we have got to do something. What is the B. H. K. for, if it isn't to right all wrongs?"

That was the beginning of one of the biggest things we ever did, only we didn't think of it at first. It takes time to think up big things, as Skinny says.

We had something else to think about for a while. Our ball game was soon to come off and we had to do a lot of practicing. Skinny says for me to forget about the ball game or else write it in invisible ink. You see, we were beaten, 19 to 11. It wouldn't have happened if Tom Chapin had been there but he couldn't come. We were ahead at first and thought we were going to beat. Then Jim Donovan, the leader of the Gingham Ground Gang, knocked a

home run, with three men on bases, and we couldn't seem to do a thing after that.

But the very next day after the game something happened which made us forget all about the ball game and everything else except what we could do to Graham.

We found Willie crying again and afraid to go home. He had run away to see the game and his father had whipped him for it with a club, until he was sore all over and hardly could walk. He showed us the welts on his back. It was awful. Skinny went white, he was so mad, and his cheeks are most always red and shiny, like apples when you rub them.

The next morning I found the Sign out on the sidewalk in front of our house. It said for the Klan to meet at the cave, at two o'clock that afternoon. And there was blood dripping down !

CHAPTER XIII

SOME ASTONISHING ADVENTURES

THAT man Graham had one friend, and I guess he was about the only one he did have in the whole town — a man as mean as himself. This man had a farm, on a lonely country road, part way up East mountain. It was an easy walk from the village and 'most every Saturday evening Graham walked up there.

On the first Saturday evening after the meeting in the cave, he walked out there, and as usual started for home about ten o'clock. He sometimes carried a lantern but he had been over the road so many times he could find his way in the dark, without any trouble.

It isn't any fun walking along a country road at night, even when there is someone with you; but when you are all alone and it is dark — Say ! you will never catch any of us out that way.

“That is when ghosts walk,” Skinny often had told us, especially about midnight. It is scary, any-

how, whether you really believe in such things or not, as we found out in the cemetery, after putting Ezra Bowen's hay in the barn.

Mother says that night-time is when the conscience gets busy. It makes cowards of people and they see things.

"I should think George Graham would be afraid to go out alone after sundown," she went on. "I don't believe he has a conscience, even though he does pretend to be so pious; but he is a coward, just the same. Such men always are."

Anyhow, Graham was walking down the lonely country road on the Saturday night I am telling about. Maybe he was thinking of Ezra Bowen and that mortgage; I don't know. We were.

Just as he was passing the loneliest place in the whole road, a ghost sprang out at him from behind a bush. You could tell that it was a ghost because it wore a white sheet and waved its arms in a frightful way. It was about as big as Skinny.

I don't know whether ghosts ever talk or not. Mr. Norton says that they gibber, whatever that is, and squeak. He read it in a book, he told Skinny. This one didn't have time to gibber or anything else, for Graham gave a great jump, like when a horse

shies at a white paper, and went tearing down the road toward home.

After him ran the ghost, reaching out its arms to grab him, and too much out of breath to do any gibbering or even squeak. And after the ghost ran five masked figures, in black robes and peaked hats. But Graham didn't see those at all. He was too far in the lead and running too fast.

"Hold on,—fellers,—I am—all in!" panted the ghost, as the man came in sight of the first houses and turned down toward Park street.

"Great snakes, Skinny!" urged Bill. "We want to see what happens when he gets home."

"We couldn't get there in time; he is 'most there now. Gee, I never saw a man run so fast. A feller can't keep up when he has a sheet trailing around his legs and catching under his feet."

But when Graham reached his house, there was the ghost, all in white, sitting on the door-step waiting for him, as comfortable as you please. Anyway, it looked like the same one, in the dark.

He stopped in his tracks when he saw it, too scared to yell even; then, as he looked, the ghost rose slowly in the air and floated away. It was too much. Giving one yell, he dove into the house and slammed

the door. A few minutes later every room was ablaze with light. He wasn't going to take any chances.

That is what we saw, a few minutes later, when we passed the house and hunted up Hank and Benny to find out what had happened. We didn't get there in time to see the ghost but we saw the house all lighted up like a party.

"It was enough to scare anybody," said Hank, when he had told us about it. "I was almost scared myself. The balloons, wrapped in a sheet, looked just like the ghost of a man, sitting there in the dark, after we had tied the thing to the steps. It kind of swayed back and forth in the breeze. When we cut the string it seemed to make a jump right at him, then rose into the air and floated out of sight. It was great."

"I sort of feel as if something worse is going to happen to him next Saturday night," said Skinny, as he was starting for home. "How about it, Hank? Oh, no. Maybe not. I hope I can get into the house without their hearing me."

You see, Hank knows how to make things. Skinny can think of what to do better than any of us but Hank is better at making machines. He

says he is going to be an inventor, or something. Down in his cellar there is a shelf full of all kinds of chemical stuff that he knows a lot about. Sometimes when he mixes different bottles together and maybe gets the wrong bottle, there is such a smell in the cellar that his folks can't stand it.

We were afraid that Graham might not go up to his friend's house the next Saturday night, on account of having seen the ghost, but he went, just the same. At one place the path to town leaves the road and cuts cross-lots, until it strikes the road further down, passing between two trees on the way.

As Graham walked between the trees, two great white wings came out and moved back and forth, and a voice from above was heard, saying,

"Graham, thou must do better, or die."

It scared him almost to death. "I will, Lord, I will," he whined, getting down on his knees.

Then, as he looked up toward the sound of the voice, he saw, in the faint light, Skinny sitting on a limb and wearing his black robe and peaked hat. It was too dark to see much of anything but he could see a figure sitting there, and it wasn't the figure of an angel. He didn't wait to see any more. Maybe he remembered the stories about the devils

with their forks, who came up out of the cemetery, and thought they were after him.

Skinny tried to dodge around a limb, out of sight, but before he could move the man was tearing down the path, as fast as he could make his legs go.

We were following after more slowly, when Skinny saw It. We had just come out of the path into the road again. Down the road a little way, was a small farm-house, on the mountain-side, every room dark. The folks had been in bed and asleep a long time, and we were supposed to be. Far below, we could see one or two lights in the village, shining through the darkness, seeming to make the night even more lonesome and scary.

“What’s that ?” whispered Skinny.

We stopped running and stood there, looking to see what he was pointing at. We didn’t know what we were scared at; we were just scared. Maybe it was the way Skinny said, “What’s that ?”

Beyond the fence, we saw something, we didn’t know what — something white, slowly moving toward us, seeming to sort of float there in the dark.

“Great snakes !” said Bill. “It’s the real thing; I ’most know it is. That’s what you get, Skinny Miller, playing ghost. They don’t like it.”

“ We’ve got to go back, fellers, around the road,” moaned Skinny, wetting his lips with his tongue. “ It’s a lot farther but they are after us.”

Our knees almost gave way under us, as we turned to run. Suddenly Bill hit his foot against a stone and I saw him stiffen and look back toward the ghost.

“ Wait a second,” said he. “ I’m going to heave a rock at it.”

“ It will go right through, Bill. You can’t hit ’em, and it will make ’em madder,” gasped Skinny, trying to grab his arm.

But before we could stop him, Bill picked up the stone and threw it with all his might at the ghost. More frightened than ever, we started to run. I don’t care what you say, that was no time to be waiting around to see what was going to happen.

Bill is the best runner and the best thrower in the bunch. He doesn’t always hit but when he does — good night; that’s all I have to say. This time he hit. And it didn’t go through !

As the stone struck, fair and square, with a thud, the ghost gave a startled jump, kicked its hind feet in the air, and started down the field like the wind, in a frightened gallop.

"Aw, Gee!" said Harry, "You are a nice bunch of Scouts to be scared at an old white horse. Come on. Let's get home before it eats us."

That is what it was — a white horse in the pasture, wondering what was going on at that time of night. He found out, all right, when Bill hit him with that stone.

"I could have lassoed him," said Skinny, as we walked along, "if those sheets hadn't been tied to my rope."

Nothing happened after that for two or three nights. The folks made us go to bed early. Besides, we had to hold several meetings of the B. H. K., before we could decide what to do and get ready for it.

Finally, came the great night, and with it most of the boys. I don't know how the others did it but I climbed out of a window on to the roof of the back stoop, and then slid down a round post.

It was almost midnight, and was scary in the barn, with all kinds of queer noises. We had to go in, for our robes were there and, tied to a beam, was another balloon-ghost, which we had made and left there ready for business.

When we saw it, as we crept to the top of the

stairs, we were almost scared ourselves, for the thing swayed there in the dark — head and body, without legs, all in white. It was a fearful sight.

Just as the clock in the Baptist church steeple struck twelve, the ghost floated up to the window in Graham's house, where we knew he was sleeping, and one of the boys tapped on the glass with a fish-pole.

I don't know what Mr. Graham thought when he woke up and looked toward the window but I know what I should have thought to have seen that thing grinning at me, at midnight.

Hank was in a tree just opposite the window, with Benny's magic lantern, which his folks had given him on the Christmas before. When the grinning ghost had looked in at the window long enough to be seen, we pulled it back, and a circle of light from the lantern was shot through the window, on to the bedroom wall. Hank then put in a slide which he had made and in the circle of light to the wondering eyes of Graham, awakened from a sound sleep by a ghost, appeared these words:

“Repent, you sinner. You have oppressed the weak. You have robbed the poor and sick. Thrice have you been warned. This is your last chance.

Repent, or your doom is sealed."

Skinny wanted some blood dripping down but Hank wouldn't do it, ghosts not having any blood. Of course, Ezra Bowen wasn't sick; he only had his leg broken; but it sounded better that way.

It worked. That is the funny thing about it, when I come to think it over. Father went up to Ezra Bowen's, a day or two afterward, to find out just when the mortgage would be due and to tell him that he need not worry about it. He found Mr. Bowen sitting by a window, with his broken leg propped up in a chair, and looking very happy.

"What do you think?" said he. "That old skinflint has been up here and renewed my note. It must be that the world is coming to an end."

Yes, sir; Graham repented and was pretty decent after that, and Willie didn't have any more trouble. Nobody could understand it, until we finally told Mr. Norton. It was too good to keep.

He laughed; then looked sober, and shook his head a little, as he sat there thinking.

"I don't know what to say to you boys," he told us, finally. "Graham had it coming to him all right, and he seems to be trying to do the square thing now. You have done a good deed but in a very

bad way. I feel somewhat to blame, for I encouraged your fun when I found out that you wanted to do helpful things only. Still, maybe nothing else would have touched him. Graham is a very superstitious man, as much so in his way as Sam Cooper. What he calls religion is not the real thing, by any means, or hasn't been up to the present time."

"Betcher life he had it coming to him," said Skinny. "Look how he beat up Willie, his own boy, and how he tried to spoil the Fourth of July."

"Yes, I think he had, and then some. I am not worrying about him but about you boys. It is never safe or wise to take the law into your own hands, although sometimes the temptation is strong and it seems almost necessary. Anyhow, I want you to cut out the rough-stuff after this. There are plenty of good deeds which you can do in a proper way. What do you say? Will you cut it out?"

"Out she goes," Skinny told him, for Mr. Norton was looking at him, being patrol leader. "But, say! it was fun. I only wish I'd 'a' lassoed the critter, like I did the bear that time."

"I do not want to interrupt the good deeds," began Mr. Norton, a few days later, "but I am going to take a couple days off, beginning tomorrow,

and would like to have you boys go along. I think I told you that a friend of mine in North Adams is interested in looking up the old Indian trail and the early roads across the mountains, from the Hudson valley to the Connecticut valley. He wants us to go up on Florida mountain with him. It will be fun and we shall be able to learn something about the early history of this section, for my friend has made a study of that sort of thing.

"Take your Boy Scout packs along and we'll camp out somewhere all night. I don't want to bother with tents; I can stand it, if you can. We shall find some good place to sleep. I'll get my friend, Bradford, to tell you stories about the old trails, around the campfire in the evening. I mean, of course, if your folks will let you go."

"Shall we take our robes and masks?" Benny asked.

"Well, not this time. You might scare somebody to death and that wouldn't do."

It sounded good to us and it sounded good to our folks. The eight Scouts of Raven Patrol were ready to start, bright and early the next morning.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BLAZED TRAIL

PART of the fun of doing anything, or of going anywhere, is in getting ready. It is true of Fourth of July; it is true of Christmas, and it is true of a hiking trip. Mr. Norton's plan was for us to go by train to North Adams, where his friend, Mr. William Bradford, would join us, and to walk up the mountain from there.

"It is a beautiful ride," said he, "but an even more beautiful walk, especially as I do not happen to own a car. You boys climb up and down Bob's Hill so much, you are not suffering for exercise, but I have been cooped up in an office and need action. You chaps will be like every one else, I suppose. When you have grown up and can afford one, you will buy an automobile and then, goodbye to walking."

"It is fun to ride, just the same," Skinny told him.

"I know it is but why the hurry? Folks nowa-

days go through life so fast they don't have time to see anything. On every side there is beauty and inspiration, hidden from many who ride. I was talking with a man, just the other day, who had been driving through the Adirondack mountains — a wonderful ride, too far to walk, of course — perfect roads, beautiful lakes and woods, hills and mountain peaks in the distance, picturesque scenery everywhere. What do suppose he bragged about when he was telling me where he had been ? ”

“ The fish he caught,” said Bill. “ You can get all kinds of fish on a trip like that. Why, once—”

“ No. There would have been some sense in that. I couldn't make out that he went fishing at all; but he drove two hundred miles a day in his car ! Think of going to the Adirondacks to absorb the beauty of that great playground and driving two hundred miles a day in an automobile ! Whiz ! Bang ! Away they go, and see nothing.”

Skinny groaned. “ Nobody home ! ” he said, shaking his head. “ Just a plain nut. You shouldn't be talking to such folks.”

“ I am not sure that I follow you but I think that you have caught the idea I was trying to express in my feeble way.”

It took some hustling but early next morning we were ready to start — blankets, rations, camping outfit and everything, except that Skinny, forgot something important — but I'll put that in later.

From North Adams we went up the Mohawk Trail. This is a new road, from where Hoosic river flows into the Hudson to North Adams, then over the mountains to Deerfield river, and on to the Connecticut.

Maybe I have not told you that the Hoosac range is not a single ridge. There are two ridges, with a high valley between. That is where the little town of Florida is, in that high valley, and Savoy is farther south. Some farming is done there. It is all right in summer but in winter it must be fierce. The top of the west ridge, looking down on North Adams and Hoosic valley, is called Perry's Pass. The top of the east ridge, looking down on Deerfield valley, is called Whitcomb Summit.

We followed the Trail up into the high valley, beyond Perry's Pass, stopping at every turn in the winding road to look back and down. It was great but I can't tell about it. I don't mean that it is a secret, like some of our doings, but I don't know the words.

"Nobody knows them," Mr. Norton told me, when I asked him about it. "The words haven't been made which will describe such views. They must be seen and felt, to be appreciated."

Anyhow, as we looked back from the top of the ridge at Perry's Pass, we could see old Greylock, lifting high his head and gazing across at us, as if wondering where those Bob's Hill boys were going this time. All around him, like the "guards of liberty" in Bill's Last Day piece, were smaller peaks, and mountain ranges beyond. At our feet almost, only far below, nestled North Adams. And to the south and the north and the west, shone the waters of Hoosic river, winding through green valleys, dotted with villages and hemmed in by mountains.

We sat there a long time, looking and resting and talking; then went on and after a while turned off from the Trail into an old road, which led us through the high valley, between great patches of mountain laurel.

"It is a queer thing," Mr. Bradford told us, "but there does not seem to be any mountain laurel on the Greylock range, while the Hoosac range is white with it during the blossoming time. It is a fine sight."

At one place we saw an old shed which, he said, marked Central Shaft, a deep hole dug when they were building Hoosac Tunnel. It goes clear down to the tunnel, more than one thousand feet below.

"A horrible accident happened there," he went on, "October 19, 1867. Thirteen men were working at the bottom of the shaft, at that time down nearly six hundred feet."

"Great snakes!" exclaimed Bill. "Thirteen! Didn't they know any better than that? It's a wonder they were not all killed."

"They were."

"Tell us about it," urged Mr. Norton. "I have heard the story, of course, but have forgotten some of the details."

"There was an explosion of gasoline, which set the building over the shaft on fire and stopped the machinery. Down below was a series of platforms, with connecting ladders between. On the top platform all kinds of tools were stored. The fire stopped the working of the pumps, which had been pumping water out of the hole and fresh air in. Burning timbers soon began to fall down the shaft. When the top platform gave way, three hundred drills and many timbers rained down on the men.

"The next morning a man named Thomas Mallery had himself lowered into the shaft. It was a brave thing for him to do and I want you to know his name."

"I'll bet Tom Chapin would have done it," put in Bill. "Why, once Tom—"

We motioned for Bill to keep quiet and not to stop the story.

"Mallery found fifteen feet of water in the shaft but no trace of the men. When he was pulled out again he was almost dead from foul air. Nearly a year passed before the bodies were found. That old tunnel cost many lives, 192 in all."

"How were they able to find a rope long enough?" asked Mr. Norton.

"Mallery spliced several together. He was an old sailor."

He was about to say more, when Skinny gave a great moan that stopped him.

"My rope!" he wailed. "I forgot my rope. It's bad luck. Something will happen sure."

I don't see how Skinny came to forget his rope; he almost always takes it with him on hikes like that.

"Now, that is too bad," Mr. Norton told him. "Maybe we'd better go back. I supposed, of course,

that Skinny would lasso two or three bears for us on this trip. A bear steak would taste good, about now, and a little bacon wouldn't be half bad. Suppose we go on to that house, which I see yonder, and get some fresh water; then build a fire somewhere and eat our lunch."

We'll not forget that lunch in a thousand years, or a hundred, anyhow. It is fun to eat anytime, when you are hungry, as we almost always are, but up there on the mountain, where we seemed to be a long way off from everything and everybody, and we almost expected to see a bear or an Indian pop out from behind every bush, and the smell of frying bacon driving us almost crazy — well, just try it sometime, that's all.

"Now," said Mr. Norton, after we had finished and were lying around on the grass, too full to walk for a while, "I am going to thank Mr. Bradford for bringing us up here and ask him to tell us something about the old road that he is trying to find. This will be almost as enjoyable as a regular campfire."

"Well, fellows," Mr. Bradford began, "I shall cut it short. Boys, as a rule, are not much interested in the past. They live in the present. My friend, Norton, evidently has told you that I am

collecting data for a history of this part of our state. Just now I am trying to mark on a map the various roads which have crossed the Hoosac range.

“There have been a number of such roads. First came the original Mohawk trail, very different from the present one, which is attracting tourists from far and near. It was an Indian trail, probably not more than eighteen inches wide, after the manner of Indian trails. The Indians, you may know, walked one behind another, stepping in each other's footprints.”

“Wait a second,” said Bill, who had been sort of fidgeting around. He took a long breath and began.

Nobody ever heard Bill Wilson do any better than he did that time. You would have thought there was a whole tribe of Indians loose. Mr. Bradford looked surprised, never having heard Bill before, and finally put his hands over his ears. Mr. Norton took out his watch and pretended to see how long it would take Bill to get that yell out of his system.

Soon the members of the Band jumped up and pranced around in a circle, with Bill in the middle. Skinny pulled out his Boy Scout hatchet, for a tomahawk, and began a war dance, chopping away at the air and singing all kinds of Indian words that

he made up as he went along, and we all followed after, doing the same. I guess Mr. Bradford was almost paralyzed before we finished.

“There ! ” said Bill, when at last we stopped, being out of breath. “Go on, Mr. Bradford. We have more room now and can listen better.”

“I surely thought I was going to be scalped that time,” he began, laughing to himself. “You see in the early days, the first settlers in the Deerfield valley found an Indian trail, leading up the river from the town of Deerfield, and the first settlers at Albany found an Indian trail, leading up Hoosic river. It happens that these two rivers, one flowing toward the east into the Connecticut and the other, toward the west into the Hudson, come within less than five miles of each other, with this mountain between. The Indians, in going and coming between the two valleys, took the shortest and easiest way across the mountains, which is about here.

“After that, back in 1755 I think it was, a rough road was built across the mountain, for horses and ox carts; then came a new road up the eastern slope, now called the Shunpike; after that, the old stage road, used for regular traffic before the tunnel was opened; and now we have this new Mohawk Trail.

“What I want to do this afternoon is to find that old road, built in 1755; follow it down the east slope, and particularly to find and mark on my map a spot which is called Flat Rock in the early records. We ought not to have much trouble following the road because, some fifteen years ago, a Boston man blazed the trees along the old trail. This road which we have been following crosses that old road somewhere, and I want you boys to help me find that blazed trail.”

“Everybody scatter,” shouted Skinny, “and look for signs.”

Rushing out from the road in every direction, we started, laughing and calling to each other.

“Remember, it may not be much of a road,” Mr. Bradford warned. “It has not been traveled for a hundred years in places.”

“What do you mean by blazed trail?” asked Benny, who wanted to be sure what he was looking for.

“In the early days, to keep from getting lost in the woods, a trail was marked by cutting a chip off from a tree occasionally. Marking the trees that way was called blazing. Our trouble will come in finding the blazes. The cuts must have grown over

in fifteen years. I am inclined to think, however, that the blazed part of the trail does not come over this far."

He was right, too. We couldn't find anything that looked like it.

"Guess what," said Benny, after we had hunted until we were tired. "There is another house. Let's stop and get a drink of cold water; and I think I see an apple tree."

"It is an abandoned farm," explained Mr. Norton, when we had come close enough to see. "The people couldn't make a living here, or else could not stand the terrible winters."

The house looked as if it had stood empty a long time. The windows were gone and some of the timbers had rotted away. It gave us a queer feeling, when we had opened the door and stepped inside and wandered through the bare rooms, where folks used to live and maybe boys like us used to play.

"Well, let's go, fellows," called Mr. Norton, after a time. "We want to reach Cold river and make camp before dark."

We started with a shout and soon were out of sight of the house. Then, after a little, we heard Mr. Norton call,

"Has anybody seen Benny?"

You could have knocked me down with a feather when he said that. I hadn't thought of it before and hadn't noticed that Benny was not with us, because we had scattered so in looking for the trail, but I hadn't seen him and nobody else had.

"Benny! Benny!" Mr. Norton shouted, and we all set up a fearful racket, but Benny did not answer.

"Who saw him last?" he asked, getting us all around him.

"I saw him at the house," Skinny told him. "He was wishing he had a drink of cold water. I haven't seen him since."

Mr. Norton was frightened. He turned pale, as he started back to the old house, on a run.

"Hurry!" he told us. "Something has happened!"

CHAPTER XV

SCOUTS TO THE RESCUE

SOMETHING had happened to Benny ! When Mr. Norton said that I knew what had happened, and it almost paralyzed me.

Once on Park street, when they were moving a building and it stood in the street over Sunday, a loose plank fell down and killed a boy who had been climbing around. That old farm house wasn't safe to climb around in. Mr. Norton told us to be careful. It must have stood there empty many years, for the floors were rotten in places and some of the timbers probably were rotten.

I knew what had happened, all right. Either a timber had fallen and struck Benny or else the floor had given away somewhere and let him through into, I didn't know what.

I guess Mr. Norton was thinking the same thing, for when he passed me there was a frightened look on his face and even Bill couldn't keep up with him, he ran so fast.

There wasn't any sign of Benny when we reached the old house again.

"Benny ! Benny !" we called; then listened. There was no answer and no noise anywhere on the mountain except, now and then, a bird chirping in the trees.

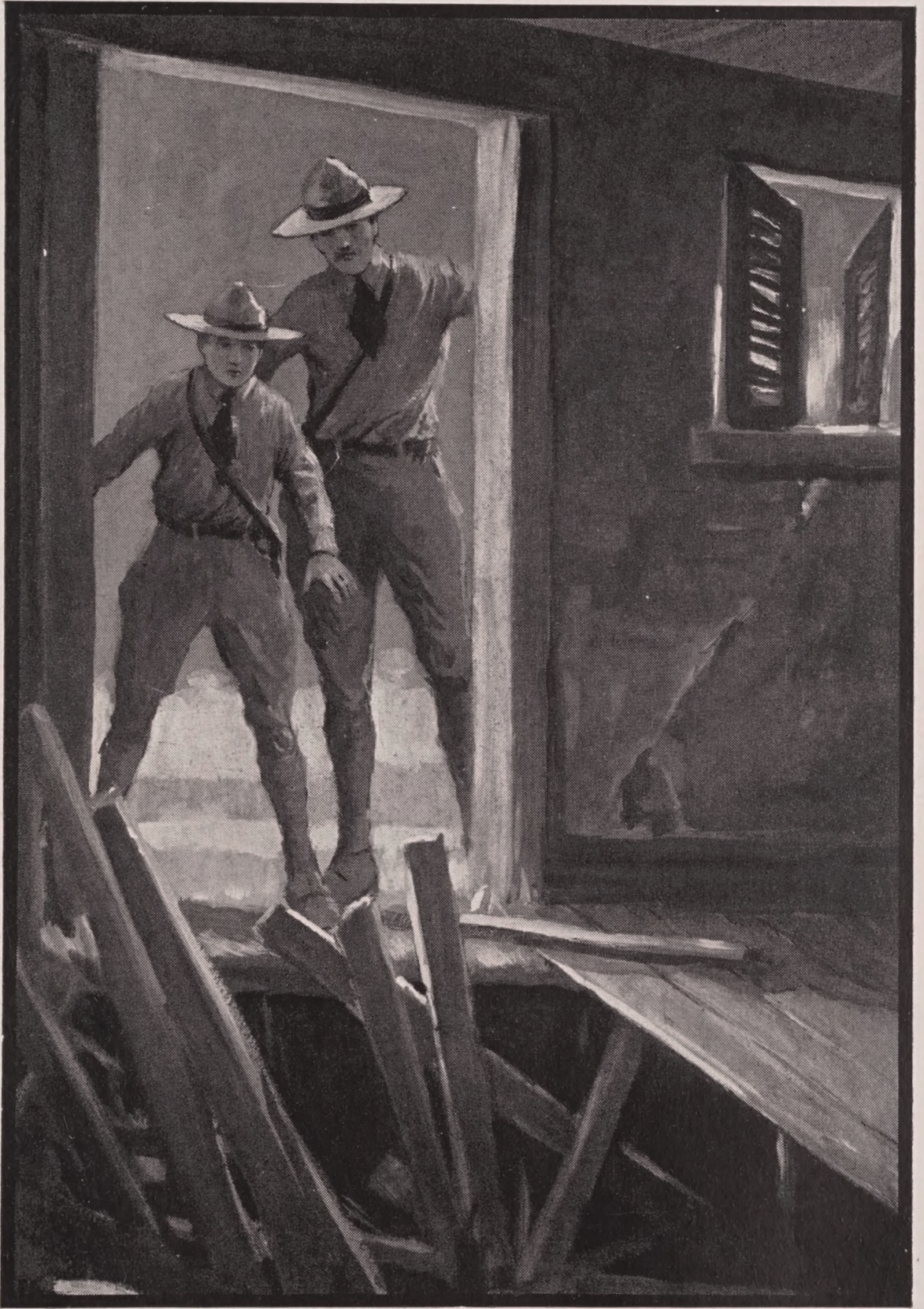
"Didn't someone say he was wishing for a drink ?" asked Mr. Bradford, when we were wondering what to do next. "I do not want to alarm you needlessly but these old houses often had wells in the cellar. Maybe—"

"Good God !" exclaimed Mr. Norton; but I think he was praying, not swearing.

We hurried into the house again, to look for the cellar door, careful where we stepped because the floor was bad in places. Mr. Norton found the door but the cellar stairs had all rotted out and were gone. Just then Harry gave a shout.

"I've found him !" he yelled. "Here ! Come quick !"

When we had come he showed us a little room off from the kitchen, which probably had been the pantry. We hadn't thought to look there before. The floor had given away, leaving a big hole, which led down somewhere, we didn't know where.



THE FLOOR HAD GIVEN WAY, LEAVING A BIG HOLE.

Mr. Norton lay flat on the floor and drew himself forward until his head was above the hole.

"Benny," he called. "Benny, are you down there?"

And Benny answered! His voice sounded faint but we could hear him, even back where we were standing.

"Are you hurt, Benny?"

"No-o, I guess not. Not much, anyhow. I got a crack on my bean when I fell, and it put me out of business."

"That is Boy Scout, Bradford, for saying that he struck his head against something and it knocked him senseless," explained the scoutmaster, who was beginning to feel a lot better. Then, to Benny,

"Where are you?"

"In an old cistern, I guess."

"Is there any water there?"

"Not a drop. I wish there was. You'll have to pull me out somehow. I can't climb the sides."

"Thank God, he seems to be all right," said Mr. Norton, crawling back to us. "Now, to get him out."

"My rope!" groaned Skinny. "I forgot my rope. I knew it would bring us bad luck."

"We can tie our coats together," Mr. Norton told him, "but for once, I wish you had brought your rope along."

"Wait, Benny," called Bill, who had crawled to the hole. "We are going to make a rope of our coats and we'll use our shirts, if we have to."

"I'll wait, all right," said Benny, who seemed to be feeling better every minute, now that we had found him, "but never mind the coats, I have thought how to do. There are some young hickory trees near the house. Cut long strips of the bark and twist them together. They will make a strong rope.

"Tell Skinny that I read it in a book," he shouted, as Bill was backing away from the hole.

"The boy is right," said Mr. Norton, getting out his knife. "Harry, you and Bill get busy on that tree over there. Skinny and I will take this one close to the back door. Pedro, you and Andrew see if you can find another somewhere. The others can stay and comfort Benny, only don't fall down yourselves."

It seemed a long time, although it probably was not very long, before we had a rope that would reach to the bottom of the cistern.

"Can you get hold of it, Benny?" called Bill again.

"Yes, I can get hold of it but I don't believe I can climb up."

"Tie a noose in the end and put your foot through. We'll pull you up."

Mr. Norton lay half-way across the hole and, after twisting the rope around his hands, lifted him a foot at a time. The rest of us pulled up the slack, standing close to the kitchen wall, so that the rope pressed against the door frame and couldn't slip.

"I've got him," called Mr. Norton, after a little. "Give me your hand, Benny. Now! Up with you. Careful, or you will break through in another place."

In a few seconds Benny was in the kitchen, blinking at the light but feeling happy because he was out again.

"Fellers," said Skinny, as we went out through the yard. "Let this be a lesson to you; never go out without a rope."

Mr. Norton at first thought that we'd better stay where we were and send a couple of boys down the mountain after a car to take Benny home in. It made Benny mad.

"I'm no baby," said he, "if I am littler than some of the others. I'm a Boy Scout, just the same, and Boy Scouts stick. Besides, it would scare my mother half to death. I am not hurt, anyhow. Honest, Mr. Norton, I am not."

He teased so hard that Mr. Norton finally gave in, especially as he knew that Benny was right; it would scare his mother.

"Very well, my boy. We'll go, but take it easy."

"Maybe a hickory cane would help," said Mr. Bradford, taking out his knife. It was a small knife, not made for cutting down hickory trees.

"You can use my hatchet," called Skinny.

"Don't need it."

Mr. Bradford found a young hickory and bent it down until the bark and fibre were stretched tight across the place where he was going to cut. Then he cut away with the sharp blade, bending the tree more and more, and it wasn't any trick at all.

"Now, Skinny, if you will chop it off the right length, Benny will have a walking stick, and it is a good thing to have when one is climbing mountains."

We all thought so, too, and each made a walking stick for himself, before starting down the road again to look for Flat Rock.

After tramping about a mile we found it, or something that looked like it. Mr. Bradford, who was on ahead, shouted,

“Hurrah, boys ! Here it is, I’ll bet a cooky.”

We hurried up and found that the road passed over a sort of floor of rock, where some ledge below came just to the surface.

“Flat Rock would be a good name for this,” he went on. “I think that without doubt this is the place.”

He studied the map awhile. “Now, if I am right,” he said, “we ought to pick up the blazed trail before long.”

We found it at last, the old road, and it still looked something like a road in places but in other places it was all grown up to trees and bushes. Sometimes we could see marks of old cart-wheels, made more than a hundred years ago, maybe. The blazes had grown over, as Mr. Bradford said, but by looking carefully we could find them and follow along.

“Take it easy, fellows,” cautioned the scout-master.

Easy ! What I don’t see is how they ever were able to go over that road with ox-carts, or anything

else. It was all we could do to climb down it, walking, to say nothing of hauling loads up the mountain.

"You must remember," Mr. Bradford told us, "that the road was in much better shape a hundred and fifty years ago. It probably was a difficult road at best but the bad places must have been graded and widened out with timbers and made passable. The storms of a hundred and fifty years can change things considerably. We are on the old trail, without doubt. It does not need the blazed trees to tell us that."

After a hard climb down the steep mountain-side, we came out at last into the valley of Cold river, which flows into Deerfield river. Just ahead of us was an orchard. Beyond the orchard was a barn, and we knew that there must be a farm-house not far away.

"This seems a good place to camp," said Mr. Norton, after talking it over with his friend. "Mr. Bradford tells me that he thinks he knows the man who lives here. Anyhow, he will go to the house and see if the farmer has any objections to letting some tired Boy Scouts sleep in his barn or, if the barn proves too hot, in that strawstack which I see

yonder. While he is gone, we can fill up our canteens at this spring."

"We could push on to the nearest railroad station," he added, after a moment, "and probably catch a late train back through the tunnel; but what is the use? I, for one, am tired enough to stop right here. That strawstack looks good to me and a hot supper would taste fine. Besides, there is our campfire. I want Mr. Bradford to tell us more about the early history of these trails. How about it, Skinny?"

"Listen!" said Skinny, holding up one hand and pointing at the tree-tops, where an early evening breeze was stirring the leaves.

"You are right, Captain, as usual," laughed Mr. Norton, after we had listened. "It sounds like bacon frying, and no mistake."

"He says for us to make ourselves at home," called Mr. Bradford, as he turned into the orchard, lugging a pail and a basket. "He even offered me a bed, being the most respectable-looking tramp in the bunch, but I told him that you boys would be afraid to sleep alone and I'd have to go back and keep the bears away."

"Boys," said Mr. Norton, "if we had time and

were not so hungry, we'd duck him in the river for that. Under the circumstances, let's build a fire and cook supper."

"Everybody scatter and bring wood," ordered Skinny.

"The farmer said he was willing to help along the good work to this extent," went on Mr. Bradford, setting down a basket of fresh eggs and a pail of milk.

If anybody asks you whether bacon and eggs, cooked out of doors, and milk and bread and butter, make a good supper when you are hungry, leave it to us.

"I certainly feel at peace with all the world," said Mr. Norton, after we had finished. "You may not believe me but I'd rather be here just now than in a stuffy office."

"Or hoeing garden," I put in.

"Well, yes, I'll accept the scribe's amendment. Will our distinguished patrol leader put the motion?"

Skinny swung his hatchet. "All in favor of the motion say aye."

He made a sign behind Bill's back, for the rest of us to keep still.

“Aye !” roared Bill, so loud that he almost scared himself, when he found out that he was the only one doing it.

After that there was another Indian dance around the fire, while the two men looked on, and pretty soon the farmer came running out to see what all the racket was about. He stood there paralyzed when he saw Skinny, with his tomahawk, prancing around the fire, making up Indian words, and the rest of us doing the same, Bill Wilson jumping higher and making more noise than anybody.

“How do you do it ?” asked Mr. Norton, when we all were quiet again and had thrown ourselves down on the grass. “I have eaten so much I hardly can wiggle and I know you boys ate more than I did. Your legs must be hollow all the way down.”

Soon it was growing dark. There was a whole mountain range west of us, shutting off the setting sun, and another higher one west of that, with only Hoosic valley and Bob’s Hill between.

“Throw on some wood, fellows,” called the scout-master. “Drive away the shadows, and then we’ll hear some more about these mountain trails from our friend, Mr. Bradford.”

We brought dead branches of trees, which we

found in the woods on the mountain-side, and stirred up the fire, until the flames leaped high in the air. Then we threw ourselves down in a half-circle, on the windward side, and waited for Mr. Bradford to begin.

CHAPTER XVI

SOME HISTORIC TRAILS

A CAMPFIRE means more than just the fire part, although that is a lot of fun always. A Boy Scout campfire means the talk around the fire, after a day of hiking maybe, when our scoutmaster tells us stories or talks to us about the things we ought to know and do. It is more than fun. Mr. Norton says it is education. Anyhow, we learn a lot when he talks to us, and he says he learns from us but I don't know what.

"Mr. Bradford is not a scoutmaster," he had told us, "but he is one of those men who like to dig back into history and see how and when things happened. Most of us are too busy, or think we are, looking after the present, to pay much attention to the past, or maybe we are too lazy to look things up for ourselves. Then along comes some man like Mr. Bradford and we just sit around a campfire and listen, or read it in a book, as Skinny seems so fond of doing."

I remembered that, as he sat there thinking what to talk about and how to begin. Mr. Bradford looked like other folks but, say ! he knew the whole history by heart — dates and everything. We couldn't understand it but were glad of it.

“ You may recall,” he began, finally, “ that when we started down the mountain I called your attention to a big pine, growing on the crest, and when we had come down into the orchard we looked up at it again. That pine tree marks the lowest spot over the mountain from the Cold river side. It stands five hundred feet above the river and can be seen from all up and down the valley. The first road climbed the steep slope of the mountain and came out at that pine. I think also it must have been a landmark for the Indians, in finding the old trail.

“ It is hard for us to imagine the time when these valleys were the hunting grounds of Indians. I suppose you learned about King Philip's War at school. As I came down the mountain this afternoon, I was thinking that King Philip, the old Indian chieftain, must have gone over that trail more than once in his day, not to mention countless other Indians. King Philip was trying to get the

Mohawk Indians, on the other side of the mountains, to join him in his war against the Whites.

“ Back in the old days of the French and Indian War, troops carrying supplies passed over the trail, on their way to Crown Point and Ticonderoga, which you also have learned about at school. The first road was built about 1755; it probably followed the old Indian trail as closely as possible. That was the road we came over. This road seemed necessary in order to make it easier to get supplies to Fort Massachusetts. Before the road was built some cannon were sent from Boston to Fort Massachusetts, going by water to New York; then up the Hudson to Albany, and from there overland to the Fort. This was in 1751.”

“ Where was Fort Massachusetts ? ” asked Bill.

“ It was a frontier post on the great trail from Canada. The fort was built of logs in 1745 and stood a little west of North Adams, on Hoosic river. The French flag waved over it once for a short time. A force of French and Indians captured it in 1746 and burned it to the ground. The next year it was built up again.

“ On the way down I called your attention to a spot where the trail made a short turn around a

cliff. In the old days more than one ox-team failed to make that turn and went over the cliff. That finally resulted in a second road, built by a man named Samuel Rice. The records say that Rice petitioned the General Court, back in 1764, for permission to build the road. Here, I have a copy of the old record in my pocket. Maybe your scribe will read it to us."

He handed me a slip of paper and I read aloud, standing close to the fire so that I could see:

"The road over Hoosuck mountains being at present very dangerous, several creatures having lost their lives thereof, your petitioner hath found a better place for a road, and as there is about 200 acres of Province Land near the Deerfield river, prays for a grant of same, he obliging himself to build up said mountain road as good as the land will allow of."

"That second road," went on Mr. Bradford, when I had finished reading the slip, "instead of coming down into Cold river valley, the way we came, came directly down to the Deerfield valley, in a series of loops, to a point where the bridge now crosses Deerfield river, below Hoosac Tunnel. That second road afterward came to be called the 'Shunpike.'

“Benedict Arnold once went over that road horseback. He was crossing the Hoosac mountains on his way to Williamstown. This was before he made his great mistake and tried to sell out his country to the British during the Revolutionary War. Does anybody remember when the Battle of Lexington took place ? ”

Skinny stood up and began his Paul Revere piece, folding his arms like a general:

“Listen, my children, and you shall hear
“Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere,
“On the eighteenth of April, in Seventy-five,
“Hardly a man is now alive
“Who —”

He would have said more of it but we pulled him down and shut it off.

“That is right, and Arnold rode over this mountain on the sixth of May, in seventy-five, if I remember the date correctly, less than three weeks after the ‘embattled farmers fired the shot heard round the world.’

“In 1786 a third road was built from the sale of lands. It began to climb the mountain from

Deerfield valley, that being the nearest point to Hoosic valley, on the other side of the mountain. For the same reason this direct route was selected for Hoosac Tunnel. The third road was the old stage road, which Hoosac Tunnel put out of business. Toll was charged for its use and those who did not wish to pay toll used the Shunpike; that is what gave it the name. Parts of all three roads are still in use.

“The fourth road, our wonderful Mohawk Trail, is famous the country over. You know all about that. It follows the old stage road in places and in other places cuts across somewhere else.”

“This has been very interesting,” said Mr. Norton, when Mr. Bradford had finished, “and I, for one, have learned a great deal, although I fear that there is only one of the dates I shall remember. Skinny has told us so much and so often about 1775, we can not forget it easily. I think Mr. Bradford deserves a rising vote of thanks. I shall not call for ayes and noes on the question because the good people of Charlemont go to bed early and, although some distance away, I am afraid Bill might disturb their slumbers.

“All who have enjoyed the campfire and wish to

thank Mr. Bradford will please stand. It is unanimous, Will. Now, bring your blankets, fellows. It is time to hit the hay, or straw, as the case may be. Skinny will throw what is left of the water on the fire."

"Wait," said Skinny. He stirred the hot coals to make them blaze up for the last time and stood there with his arms folded, in the flickering light, while we all wondered what was coming.

"Fellers," he began, "Mr. Bradford is great stuff. He is the Peruvian doughnut, all right. If he hadn't wanted to find Flat Rock, we shouldn't have had this trip, and if he hadn't been a history feller, we shouldn't have known about these trails. I say, let's take him into the Band, as an honorary member. Those in favor say aye."

"Easy, boys, easy!" cautioned Mr. Norton.

He was too late. Folks must have thought some Mohawk Indians were coming down the trail in their warpaint.

We had slept in a lot of places — in our barn; in a tent; on top of Greylock, with nothing but the ground to lie on and no blankets to cover us, but we never had slept in a straw stack before. Straw makes a fine, soft bed but it doesn't smell as good

as hay. We wrapped our blankets around us to keep off the dew and make us warm, for the nights are sometimes cool among the mountains, and soon were fast asleep.

I don't know how long we had been sleeping there but it was along in the night sometime, when something touched me and waked me up. I lay there quiet, afraid to move. Whatever it was, was chasing around the stack and rummaging in the straw. I could hear the patter of footsteps, sometimes coming toward me and then moving away. I didn't know what to make of it.

Skinny, who lay next to me, was dreaming and muttering in his sleep. I heard him say something about his rope and bears. Then I knew what the thing was.

There are bears in the Hoosac mountains, not many perhaps, but once in a while somebody sees one. My heart almost stopped beating, I was so scared, but I reached out one foot and kicked Skinny.

"Sh-h-h!" I warned, when he was awake. "Lie still and pretend you are dead. They won't touch you then."

"Who won't? What's the matter?"

"Bears!" I told him. "The woods are full of 'em. Don't you hear them running around in the straw?"

"Jee-rusalem!" he whispered, after he had listened for a minute. "I'll bet he's as big as a lion and maybe as fierce. I'd ought to have brought along my rope."

We both lay quiet, listening, then Skinny nudged me and began again,

"Pedro, where is that hickory bark rope?"

"Bill had it the last time I saw it."

"Come on. Let's get Bill and lasso the critter. Mr. Norton wants a bear steak; he said so. It will surprise him some."

The secretary didn't want to do it. All I could think of was something Mr. Norton had told us, about a man who bet he could write a story and use only twelve words. This was the story:

"Algy met a bear. The bear was bulgy. The bulge was Algy."

I didn't care so much about Algy because I didn't know him but I didn't want to be the bulge part of any story like that. I told Skinny so.

"Am I patrol leader, or ain't I?" he asked.

"You may be patrol leader," I told him, "but

I am secretary and scribe and keeper of the secret records. How can I write up the minutes of the meeting when I am only a bulge ? ”

He couldn't answer that and didn't try.

“ Well, I am going, anyhow,” he said. “ There can't any bear fool around Gory Gabe and live. I'll dare you to do it.”

That settled it. When anybody dares you to do a thing, you have to do it. That's all there is about it.

Holding our breath, almost, we carefully slid out of the straw backward and crawled over to where Bill was lying. He started up with a jerk when Skinny touched him, and the thing gave a jump and ran off toward the mountain.

“ Now, you've gone and scared him,” complained Skinny. “ We wanted him for breakfast.”

Bill was mad at first because we had waked him up but when he found that it was a bear he began to get excited and was sorry that he had scared it away.

After we had lain there a while, whispering, the thing came back. We could hear it on the other side of the stack. Skinny reached for the bark rope and tied a slip knot in the end. Then we started,

crawling on our hands and knees, a few inches at a time, and not making a sound.

After a little I touched Skinny, who was ahead. "What will we do if you miss?" I asked.

"Play dead, like you said. He'll come and smell of us but won't bite us. I read it in a book."

"Great snakes!" whispered Bill, putting his lips close to Skinny's ear. "What if we can't hold him? Hadn't we better wake up the rest of the gang?"

"And scare the critter away again? Not much."

By this time we had rounded the stack. And there stood the bear! We could see him in the dim light, like a darker shadow. He had his back toward us and was trying to make up his mind, maybe, which boy to turn into a bulge first.

"He's as big as a house," moaned Bill. "I 'most wish I hadn't come."

Skinny motioned for him to be quiet, took a good hold of the rope and crept forward. We could see him quite plain in the bright starlight. When he turned away from Bill, he was wetting his lips with his tongue and I knew that he was just as scared as we were. But with Skinny being scared doesn't make any difference. He goes ahead, just the same.

Slowly, he drew near the bear and not a sound

could we hear. Skinny might have been a shadow himself, for all we could tell. Then we saw him raise up, whirl the loop around his head and throw. At the same instant, Bill and I dropped flat on the ground and played dead, only I looked toward the bear once.

Biff ! The rope hit the thing on his head but the loop didn't go over. Skinny had missed !

Then, as I stretched out stiff and closed my eyes, and was half dead from fright, anyway, there came a scared yelp and the beast went tearing toward the barn, howling his head off.

Skinny snorted in disgust. "A dog !" he exclaimed. "A measly pup ! And I wanted a bear steak for breakfast."

"What is going on here ?" called Mr. Norton, in a sharp voice, springing to his feet and peering through the darkness, ready for whatever might happen. "Is that you, Skinny ?"

"Yes, sir," said Skinny, who had been trying to steal back to his blanket, without being seen.

"What is going on ?"

"Nothing," Skinny told him, "except a dog. He's been going on for some time."

We soon quieted down and went to sleep, and that

was the last we knew until morning. Then the dog came again and with him came the farmer. He laughed when he saw us rubbing our eyes and brushing the straw out of our hair..

“Is everything all right?” he asked. “I thought I heard the dog howling in the night and didn’t know but what something had happened.”

“Something did happen,” explained Mr. Norton, “—to the dog. Our valiant patrol leader thought it was a bear and tried to get me a bear steak for breakfast.”

“Shucks!” said he. “We have wild game around here but I haven’t seen a bear in ten years.”

“That reminds me,” he went on, after a minute. “Speaking of game, if you chaps can stand Ma’s cooking, what do you say to a flock of buckwheat cakes, swimming around in maple syrup — the kind that make the butter fly?”

He didn’t have to ask that question twice. A great shout went up, that could have been heard on top of the mountain.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SIGN ON THE MILL

OUR trip across Hoosac mountains and along the blazed trail gave us so much to think about that we forgot the B. H. K. business for a while. There was enough to do without that. In the first place, we had to go swimming every day, in the Basin, and sometimes twice a day. That takes time. In the next place, — well, it is hard to tell what came next, where there was so much going on. Anyhow, we had to go berrying.

“Why buy berries?” my mother said to us one day. “The mountains are covered with them and eight able-bodied boys need exercise.”

That was what we all thought and we went after berries several times. Mr. Norton says that boys who live in big cities and even country boys who live away from the mountains don't know much about going berrying. We are sorry for them; that's all.

There is a lot of fun going berrying. It isn't just

picking berries and getting them for nothing. That is hot work. It is the whole business. You have to talk over the trip the night before and get up early in the morning to start before the sun grows hot. Then there is the climb up the mountain-side and the finding of great patches of wild berries where you don't expect to find any, and not finding them where you think maybe there are some.

After a while you come across a mountain brook, where you can drink and bathe your face and wade around a little in the cool water. Then you eat your lunch, lying on the grass by the side of the brook, where you can listen to the gurgling water as it pours over the stones, and can look down into the valley below and at the houses in the village, like toys in the distance. Maybe you hear a cow-bell somewhere; crows are cawing; a cool breeze stirs the tree tops; great clouds float overhead like ships in the bluest kind of an ocean, and you don't have to bother about school or anything.

Then, pretty soon maybe, Bill Wilson yells, "Injuns !" and you crawl behind trees and bushes, with Skinny telling what to do, and forget all about berries and everything else, until the Indians have been driven off and you have saved your scalps.

Finally, comes the walk home, after the sun has hidden behind the Greylock range and cool shadows begin to gather. It is all that, and more.

We decided to go up to the Raven Rocks after blueberries one day. The Raven Rocks are on the side of a mountain, west of the Gingham Ground. The Greylock range is behind that and between the two ranges is a high valley, which is called the Bellowspipe. From the village below, the Raven Rocks look like a great wall of rock, all up and down the mountain-side.

"Let's go through the Gingham Ground," said Skinny, when we were ready to start. "Maybe we'll see Jim Donovan and get him to go with us."

Jim Donovan is leader of the Gingham Ground Gang and of Eagle Patrol. We had an awful fight with them once—but I told about that in the doings of the Band. Anyhow, we are friends now and we like Jim first rate.

"Jim is working in the mill," somebody said. "He told me that he had to earn some money this vacation to buy new clothes."

"Why doesn't he earn it selling berries; it's more fun?" asked Skinny. But nobody could answer and we didn't try.

Pretty soon we came to the great mill, filling the air with the clatter of machines, and then it was that we thought of the B. H. K. business, or Skinny did.

"Great snakes!" said Bill, who was feeling pretty good. "What are we, Skinny? Boy Scouts or Injuns or Bandits? I feel like 'em all."

With that he stopped and braced himself. Then for a minute we couldn't hear anything except the horrible racket Bill was making.

"It's for Jim," he explained, as soon as he could speak. "He'll hear it and know that we are going past. It will make him feel better."

"Maybe he will come to a window," Skinny said. Several men were looking out to see what all the noise was about. "If he does I'll throw him one end of my rope and he can sneak down and go with us."

But no Jim looked out of a window, although we waited to see and Skinny stood ready with his rope. We felt sure that he must have heard. Probably he was working where he couldn't look out.

"I'll tell you what we are," said Skinny, "and it is time we were holding a meeting."

He felt around in his pocket, until he had found

a piece of chalk; then ran to the mill and began to draw the Sign on the brick wall. It wasn't our Bandit Sign, or Scout; in the middle of the circle was a big letter K., and the figures calling a meeting of the Klan for the next morning at ten o'clock.

"Good work, old Scout," Bill told him. "Is there blood running down?"

"Betcher life, only I couldn't show it, on account of the white chalk."

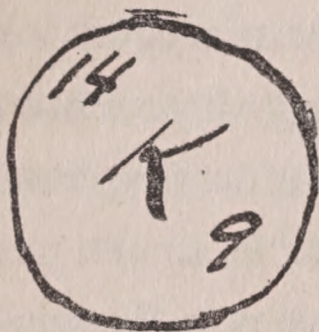
Along toward evening we came down from the mountain, with pails filled, and started home along the same road. In front of the mill there was a crowd of men, who seemed excited about something; — we couldn't tell what until we had come close. It was Skinny's Sign.

"I don't know what it means," one man was saying, "but they will tell us tonight. Let every man of you be at the meeting. Something is going to happen."

"Betcher life, something is going to happen," Skinny told us, when we were out of hearing, "but they never will find out what it is."

That was the beginning of big doings, which closed the mill and threw Jim out of a job. The men and women who worked there went on a strike.

There wasn't much use in going berrying after that because everybody else was doing it, trying to make a little money to buy things to eat. And the funniest thing was that the folks up our way thought the



Sign was a part of it.

the Sign would say, on the bridge maybe. Then Mr. Michael, the marshal, would rush out of his office to look at it; and shake his head, as if wondering what it meant.

It made Skinny real chesty and for a while after that there were so many Signs in all sorts of places that it kept us busy holding meetings, and I guess the marshal was busy trying to find out what was going on.

"For mercy's sake!" Mother exclaimed one day. "What ails you boys? You will wear the barn stairs out holding meetings and it keeps me busy making doughnuts. Let me tell you something. There is going to be a strike soon on this doughnut business and it won't be at the Gingham Ground, either."

"Oh, Mother," I told her, "we couldn't have a good meeting without doughnuts — not in the barn, anyhow. They are a part of it."

Soon there were plenty of good deeds to do. The Gingham Ground was getting hungry. Day after day passed and not a wheel was stirring in the big mill. It seemed queer not to hear the clatter of machinery, when we went through the place, on our way after berries or for a hike up Ragged mountain.

It seemed queer, too, to see the men on the street in the daytime. They used to wave at us sometimes from the open windows of the mill but now the windows were closed and the men were sitting idle on their door-steps or were gathered in groups on the street, talking excitedly and waving their arms.

We didn't know what it was about. All we knew was that the Gingham Ground folks were out of work and out of money, and that the grocery stores wouldn't let them have things to eat unless they paid for them. There were plenty of good deeds to be done but if there was any wrong to be righted, we didn't know how to do it.

We were talking it over with Mr. Norton one day, wishing the mill would start up again.

"Why don't they do the way we and the Gingham Ground Gang did after we had our fight," asked Skinny, "shake hands and forget it? What is the trouble, anyhow? Don't they pay the men enough?"

“That is what the men say but the company says something else. I suppose it is a part of the hard struggle upward — the age-long fight between those who work with their hands and those who employ them, between capital and labor. Both sides are right and both sides are wrong. The men demand more pay and shorter hours. Maybe they ought to have both, I don’t know. Most of them have a pretty hard time, at best. If a man does good work, he surely is entitled to enough pay to live on and educate his children and save up something for his old age. He ought to be able to get a little comfort out of life, both in the mill and in the home. That is what they say they want.”

“That sounds good to us,” said Skinny.

“Yes, it does. But let us be fair and look at the other side. There are always two sides, you know. Suppose, Skinny, that you Bob’s Hill boys have worked hard and gone without ice cream sodas and other things, until you have saved enough money to go into the berry business. You buy some land and plant berries. Maybe you will get a crop and maybe not but you are willing to risk it. You hire some other boys to help do the work, boys who have not saved their money, or maybe have not had a chance

to save. Would you pay those boys more money than you could make out of the berries ? ”

“ We couldn't; we'd go broke.”

“ There you have the other side. The mill owners say that if they should pay the extra wages asked, the mill would lose money, unless the employes could weave enough more gingham in a day to make up for the extra pay. And they say that if they should cut down the working day from ten to eight hours, the mill would lose money, unless the employes could weave as much gingham in eight hours as they now weave in ten hours. Maybe they could and would; I don't know. The mill owners say that they worked and saved their money, until they were able to build that mill. They are willing to risk their money but they do not propose to let somebody else tell them how to run their business.”

“ Why, that seems all right, too,” Skinny said, trying to puzzle it out. “ Betcher life when the Summer Street Gang tried to make us keep away from the Basin there was something doing right away.”

“ That is what I told you. Both are right and both are wrong. They are wrong in this way. Nobody can make me believe that there is not a work-

ing basis somewhere, which is just to both sides — to the men who pay the bills and manage the business and the men who do the work. The thing to do is to find it, and neither side seems willing, even to look for it.”

“I am afraid there will be ‘something doing,’ as you say, at the Gingham Ground, before this thing is over,” he went on, gloomily. “The men are growing ugly. The company plans to open the mill next week with workers brought in from outside. I want you boys to keep away from there.”

“We’ve got our good deeds to do,” said Bill.

“Well, do your good deeds in the daytime, and you’d better not wear your robes and masks. The first thing you know, somebody will think you are a part of the strike.”

“They do now,” I told him. “They think our Sign is a part of it.”

“All the more reason for you to keep away. There is going to be trouble, boys. There always is, when an attempt is made to break a strike.”

“Guess what, Mr. Norton,” put in Benny. “Can’t you do something about it? Both sides know you and like you. The men do, anyhow, on account of Eagle Patrol.”

"I have been trying to, Benny, and with small success so far. I have been to the company and I have been to the men. I have tried to get each to look for that just working basis, which I told you about. It is there somewhere but neither side seems willing to look for it.

"I don't want to criticize the labor unions; there is much to be said in their favor. But, too often, the rattle-brained and reckless ones attend the meetings and run things, while the sober-minded, thinking men stay at home. The glib talker becomes a leader and, too often, he is like an empty wagon. He just rattles; that is all. I do not want to be unfair but it seems to me that often the men hired by the unions to look after things are mere trouble-makers. They are good business men and their business is to make trouble. If there was no trouble, they soon would be out of a job."

"A lot of foreigners work in the mill," said Harry.

"The Indian is the only pure-blooded American that we have," Mr. Norton told him, with a smile. "It is a fact, of course, that many of the mill-hands were born in Europe and have not yet become fully Americanized. They do not understand the real meaning of liberty. Neither side seems to realize

that the big thing, in this country, is obedience to law, which is the will of the people.

“Fellows, the most dangerous thing in this great and wonderful America of ours, is disregard for law, on the part of both rich and poor; on the part of both capital and labor; on the part of grown people and boys, as well.

“I am afraid we are getting in over our heads,” he went on, after a minute. “But this thing I KNOW —”

When he said, “I know,” he gave the table such a whack I thought he would break it.

“Somewhere there is a working basis, fair to both sides. Why not look for it, instead of looking for trouble ?

“And this thing I know,” he went on, slamming the table again with his fist, “and if you forget everything else I am saying, I want you to remember this. Nearly two thousand years ago there lived a workman, named Jesus, who laid down a rule of conduct which, if followed today, would settle this strike and every other strike in five minutes. It has been called the Golden Rule, ‘Do unto others as you would have others do unto you.’ Nowadays we call it ‘The Square Deal.’

"Fellows, in a few years you will be working for somebody or somebody will be working for you. Make this your motto, '*A Square Deal for All.*'"

For a few days after that we were too busy having fun to think any more about it. Then one morning, when we were holding a meeting at the cave, we heard a whistle outside, and the scream of an eagle.

"Je-e-rusalem!" exclaimed Skinny. "The Gingham Ground Gang! Say! We'll put a head on those fellers, if they don't keep away from our cave."

"I'll go and see what they are up to," Bill told him, and crawled out through the hole.

He came back in a few minutes. "It's Jim Donavan," he said. "He is up on Pulpit Rock and he is all alone."

Jim knew about our cave. We took him there once, when he was all in, after the big fight.

"Something has happened," said Skinny, after thinking a moment, "or else Jim wouldn't have come up here while we are holding a meeting. Jim is square — clear through. Shall we go out and see what he wants, or shall we bring him into the cave?"

"Blindfold him and bring him in," growled Bill.

"'Tis well. Pedro, you go with Bill and bring the varlet in."

Jim saw us coming and made his way off from Pulpit Rock to meet us.

“Are the others here?” he asked.

“They are in the cave,” I told him. “We’ll have to blindfold you.”

“All right, only hurry up about it. There isn’t any time to lose.”

We covered his eyes with a handkerchief; then pushed him through the opening ahead of us. When he had set down and all of us had gathered around, we took off the bandage.

“Fellows,” said he, solemnly, “they are going to blow up the mill.”

CHAPTER XVIII

THE SQUARE DEAL

WHEN Jim said they were going to blow up the mill, it scared us. He was scared himself, it was easy to see that. I thought at once of what Mr. Norton had said would happen when they tried to break the strike and start the mill.

“How do you know?” Skinny asked, after a moment.

“I heard two men talking about it. I was looking for blackberries up near the Raven Rocks this morning, and so were the men, but they didn’t see me.

“‘We’ll get them all right tomorrow,’ one of them was saying. I was resting in the shade of a rock, on the other side of the bushes, where they couldn’t see me.

“‘What time will they pull it off?’ asked the other.

“‘Just after they start the mill in the morning. There will be enough powder planted to blow in the whole end of the building and set fire to the rest.’

“ ‘ Somebody will get killed,’ said the second man. ‘ It is bad business. I don’t care what happens to the mill but —’

“ ‘ You ain’t getting cold feet, are you ? ’ sneered the first man. ‘ Ain’t they taking our jobs away from us ? Do they think we are going to stand around and twiddle our thumbs while they are doing that ? ’

“ ‘ Oh, I’ll stick with the gang, of course, but I am going to be up here on the mountain looking for berries when it happens, just the same.’ ”

“ After that,” Jim said, “ the men went out of hearing.”

“ Who were they ? ”

“ I am not going to tell. They are Gingham Ground folks, boys. I have worked with them, and I am not going to give them away. But we’ve got to stop it somehow. I don’t know who is right and who is wrong in this strike business, although it seems to me the men must be right, but it can’t be right to blow up the mill and perhaps kill a lot of people.”

“ Come with us and we’ll ask Mr. Norton.”

“ No,” he objected, “ it won’t do for me to be seen in this at all. There is no telling what they

would do if they found out I was the one who told. You can tell Mr. Norton what I heard but he must not say a word about me to a living soul, and you mustn't.

"Nobody saw me come up here. As soon as the men were out of sight I climbed up to the Notch road and then came straight here, hoping I'd find you at the cave. If I hadn't I was going to cross over to Bob's Hill and down through Pedro's garden, into his house. I am going back the same way, and I am going now."

Before we could blindfold him again, he crawled through the opening of the cave, splashing into the brook in his hurry, and was gone.

"Great snakes !" said Bill. "What do you know about that ! What are we going to do ?"

There was only one thing to do. We all knew that. Get to Mr. Norton as fast as our legs could travel.

We found him at his office, as he was leaving for dinner.

"It is bad business," he said, after he had heard our story — just what the man had said at the Raven Rocks. "It is the work of hot-heads, of course. The great body of men and women em-

ployed at the mill are good citizens. They do not always understand and sometimes are misled, and their rights are not always respected; but they would not do a thing like that, I am sure."

"What can we do?" asked Skinny.

"I don't feel certain in my own mind what to do but we'll do something and do it right away. It would be easy enough to tell the police but I don't want to do that. Some of us have been working with the mill owners, trying to get them to appoint a committee to meet the strikers and settle the thing. In fact, only last night the owners agreed to it, if the strikers would appoint a similar committee and not call in outsiders. We found them inclined to be reasonable.

"But you can imagine what would happen should they hear of this. It would mean a fight to the finish and certain defeat for the strikers. The full purse is bound to win in a show-down, every time. I must think this over. Meet me here after dinner, and 'mum's the word,' as Skinny says. Keep Jim's name out of it, whatever you do. Anybody who would blow up a mill would blow up Jim's home."

"John, what is the matter?" asked my mother, when she caught me alone after dinner. "You

seem excited about something. Are you about to do another good deed ? ”

“ It’s something big,” I told her, “ but it’s a secret.”

“ Well, all right,” she laughed, “ as long as I do not have to fry doughnuts this hot day.”

“ I have thought of a plan,” announced Mr. Norton, when we met him a little later. “ It may be that I am just the one to put it across. I hope so. I have worked so much with the Boy Scouts at the Gingham Ground that the people know me and seem to have confidence in me, as Benny suggested.

“ Boys, I have faith in my fellow men, and I believe that if I can put this up to the men down there, in the right way, they will do the rest. It would be the worst thing that could happen to them, to have that plot succeed. I am going down to the Gingham Ground at once and see what I can do.”

“ May we go with you ? ” asked Skinny.

“ No, I shall have to work alone — or, wait —”

He gave a little laugh at something he was thinking about.

“ Pedro is scribe. I’ll take him along to write up the minutes of the meeting. As for the others — watch for our return. I do not believe there is any

danger. Still, men desperate enough to blow up a mill might do almost anything, and 'Be Prepared,' you know, is our Scout motto.

"Skinny, if I am not back by five o'clock, it will be because I am being held there by force. In that case, you will know what to do."

"Betcher life," said Skinny, whirling his rope, which he had taken with him.

"I think a better way," laughed the scoutmaster, "would be to tell the police and let them handle it; but we must not do that until we have to."

The scribe felt very proud, walking down to the Gingham Ground with the scoutmaster, and kind of scary, too. It was only a mile and we walked along fast, neither one saying anything. Mr. Norton was thinking what he would say to the men. I knew that, without his telling me.

When we had come near we found the street lined with men and a great crowd around the mill gate. Many of them knew Mr. Norton and spoke to him. Those whom he knew real well and trusted, he called to one side and whispered a few words to them; then went on to the next group.

In this way we passed through the village and finally climbed the stairs leading to a hall, over a

store. Some men already were there, when we went in, and they came in fast, both men and women, until the room was crowded. I knew some of them myself. Jim Donavan was in one corner, standing on something, and wondering what was going to happen, I guess.

When all were in who could get in, one of the men went out in front and spoke to them. He was the father of one of the Eagles and was a sort of leader at the Gingham Ground.

"Many of you know Mr. Norton," he said. "If you don't, your boys do. He is a scoutmaster who is greatly interested in working among the boys, and he has been of great help to our own boys at the Gingham Ground. One of his Boy Scouts from Raven Patrol is with him. Our boys belong to Eagle Patrol, and I see one or two of them here. Jimmy Donavan, over there in the corner, is their patrol leader.

"Folks, I'm not a speaker, myself, but Mr. Norton has asked us to come in here where he can say a few words to us on the quiet. I don't know what he wants to say but I do know that any friend of our boys is our friend, and we will be glad to listen to him."

There came a shuffling of feet and some hand-clapping, as Mr. Norton stepped out in front. He stood there, smiling at them, until all were quiet; then he began to speak.

I am not going to put down all that he said, although he took me along to write up the minutes of the meeting. There wasn't any place to write and I couldn't have kept up with him, if there had been.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," he began, "Friends, Fathers and Mothers of my boys—I bring you good news."

Say! He had them coming, as soon as he had said that. Then he went on and told them what he had told us boys at his office, and how he had taken it upon himself to go to some of the mill owners, who had boys in one of his Boy Scout patrols, and make an effort to settle the strike.

"I believe they are willing to do the right thing," he went on, "if only we can make sure what is the right thing."

"Yes, they are!" sneered a voice. "They are going to open the mill with scab labor, in the morning. Maybe that's what you call the right thing."

There were shouts of "That's so," and "Put him

out ”; but Mr. Norton held up one hand, and soon there was quiet again.

“ We found that they had been planning to do that very thing,” he said, “ and we succeeded in showing them where they were wrong. This was only last night. The mills will not open in the morning with outsiders in your places.

“ I told them, my friends, that I knew you men and I knew that you wanted only what was fair and just — a square deal. Was I right ? ”

There was a clapping of hands and one man yelled,

“ That’s what we want and that’s what we are going to have ! ”

“ The owners told me the very same thing, that all they asked was just and fair treatment.

“ ‘ Why, then, it is easy,’ I said. ‘ Find out what is fair and right and put those people back to work on that basis. Somewhere, men, I’ll say to you just as I said to them, somewhere — and we can find it if we look for it — there is a working basis, which will be just to them and just to you. Let’s find that basis and start these mills running again.

“ I promised them, my friends, that you would appoint a committee of employes, who would meet

with them and do their level best to find that just basis. Will you make my words good ? ”

A cheer went up from most of them, as Mr. Norton stopped speaking, and the man who had opened the meeting came forward again.

“ Name a committee, folks,” he shouted. “ How will this one suit ? ”

He named two men and a woman, and there were shouts of “ Good ! ” “ Good ! ”

“ All in favor say aye.” The ayes rattled the windows.

“ Those opposed say no.” There were only a few scattering noes.

“ The ayes have it. Boys, I am thinking we’ll all be back at work within three days.”

There was great cheering and the crowd turned to go. Then Mr. Norton stepped out in front again.

“ Stop ! ” he shouted, and they all turned back, wondering.

“ Our friend here says that you all will be back at work in three days. I believe it. But tell me this, men: How will you be able to go back to work, if there is no mill to work in ? ”

“ What do you mean ? ” somebody asked.

“ I mean this: Some of your number, perhaps

in this hall now, are plotting to blow up the mill tomorrow morning — plotting to blow up your jobs, just as you are about to get them back again. Are you going to stand for it ? ”

The whole room was in an uproar in a minute. “ Who is it ? ” “ How do you know ? ” “ No ! No ! ” were shouted at him, all at once.

“ I don't know who it is,” he told them, “ and I do not want to know; but I do know it to be a fact. A dynamite mine is to be planted tonight and if it goes off it means that grass will grow in the streets of the Gingham Ground.

“ This came to me straight, men, just before dinner today, and my answer has been to come straight to you. It is your affair, not mine, and I know you will protect your own interests and prevent this plot from being carried out.”

“ I want to add one word to what Mr. Norton has told you,” said the man who had taken charge of the meeting, as soon as he could make himself heard. “ I want to thank him for coming to us with this matter instead of going to the police. If we do not put a stop to this dynamite business, we will not deserve to be called Americans. You can be sure, Mr. Norton, that there will be no dynamite

planted tonight, and if we catch anybody trying it, he is going to get hurt, as sure as you are a foot high."

"Well, Keeper of the Secret Records," said Mr. Norton, on our way home. "I believe we have stopped this thing for a few days but I don't like to think what may happen if that committee does not get down to brass tacks."

"We ?" I began. "You, you mean."

"And when you write up the minutes of the meeting," he went on, with a smile, "don't forget to say that it was a great help to your scoutmaster to have with him a genuine Boy Scout in uniform, reminding those men of their own boys and the work he has tried to do among them."

CHAPTER XIX

SKINNY SCARES THE PICNIC

ONCE more the clatter of machines could be heard at the Gingham Ground. The mill was running again and trying to make up for lost time. It began to look as if the Klan would be out of a job.

All during the strike we had carried food to several families and kept them going. I don't know what they would have done, if we hadn't. But we didn't wear our robes, only our masks. We always went after dark and a different boy took the food to the house each time, putting on his mask before going up to the door and setting the things in the entry.

It was almost time for school to begin again and almost time for Mr. Norton to go away, which was worse. We didn't like to think about either one. School is a good thing but it isn't anything like a cave, or even our barn.

We all were meeting in the barn one day, trying to think of some good deed to do, where we could

wear our robes and have some fun doing it. Skinny looked at his watch, then drew our cave Sign on the floor. There was a circle, with the figures 9 and 14, and a big K in the center. It meant to meet at the cave in thirty minutes. There was not much more than enough time to get there.

"Guess what," said Benny, as we were about to start. "What's the matter with wearing our robes?"

"Somebody might see us," Harry told him.

"What if they did? They wouldn't know who it was. Besides, we can go up through Plunkett's woods and not put on the robes until we get in among the trees."

That seemed a good thing to do and everybody was for it. Each boy made a bundle of his robe and hat; then we chased up the railroad track to the road which turns toward the woods.

As soon as we were out of sight from the road, behind some bushes, we stopped and put our things on. It almost scared me to see the Klan in their black robes, peaked hats and masks, in the woods, that way. They didn't look like boys or anything else, I guess, unless it was the "imps of Satan" the man told about that time. It was great fun but hot with our masks on.

"Mum's the word," said Skinny, in a sort of whisper. He waved a stick and pointed. "To the cave, men. Forward."

He marched ahead and we followed after, stepping in his tracks and making no sound on the pine needles, which covered the ground. Suddenly he stopped and dropped down behind a bush. We dropped, too; we didn't know what for but it seemed best. Then we crawled up to where he was stooping down and looking through a small opening.

"Great snakes!" said Bill, when he had looked.
"Good-night!"

One after another, we crawled up and looked; then dropped back to the ground and looked at each other.

"We can take off our robes and masks," I told them, "and they won't know."

"Maybe they have ice cream," said Bill, smacking his lips.

"It's the girls in our class having their last picnic before school opens," said Harry. "They wouldn't invite us."

Skinny had been trying to think what to do, and when Harry said that I saw him sort of stiffen, as if he had decided.

"That's so !" he exclaimed. "I had forgotten it. Let's surround 'em."

"It is almost time for the meeting," I told him. "It will take too long."

"Not if we hurry," he whispered. "Everybody scatter. Make your way around on all sides. When you hear the caw of a raven, charge."

We crept away, without making a sound; then waited for the signal. Suddenly it came, from across on the other side.

"Caw ! Caw-caw !"

You can't do much charging in the woods, with robes flying and catching on the bushes, but we did the best we could. They were scared, all right. When they saw what was coming, they gave some awful screams and made a bee-line for Bob's Hill and the village. I never saw girls run so fast. They didn't even stop to put on their hats.

It tickled Skinny. "We'll show 'em," he said. "Having a picnic and not inviting us !"

He hunted around under his robes, until he found a pencil; then tore a piece of paper from one of the bundles the girls had left.

"B. H. K.," he wrote, and there was blood dripping down.

He fastened that to a tree, in plain sight, and then we hurried on to the cave. Nobody else saw us, unless somebody was looking out of Ezra Bowen's house, or out of one of the houses beyond.

We played around for a while, on Pulpit Rock and in the cave. It was great, in our robes that way, looking like bandits, or we didn't know what.

"We must do some more good deeds, fellers, or right some wrongs," said Skinny, finally, after we had crawled into the cave. "What good is the Factor Factotum Inkibus, anyhow? He hasn't found anything to do. Let's duck him under Peck's Falls."

"Duck nothin'!" Bill told him. "I don't see that the Most High and Mighty Potentate is good for much. He hasn't thought of anything for a week back."

"Guess what," put in Benny. "There hasn't anybody got a weak back."

"I was going to tell about one thing," Bill went on, "only it would be such hard work I hated to begin, — doing it, I mean, not telling it."

"If it is any harder than getting in hay, forget it," said Andy.

We all felt the same. Putting in that hay was about the hardest work we had ever done.

"Maybe it is and maybe it isn't. It is a good deed to be done, anyhow, and somebody ought to do it. I heard the folks talking about it last night."

"The meetin' will come to order," shouted Skinny, "and hear what the F. F. I. has to say."

"Old Mrs. Clark, who lives up beyond us," began Bill, "is very poor. Mr. Clark died last spring and left her without much money. Winter will be coming on before long and she will need a lot of wood to burn, to keep warm with, and she can't afford to buy any. My mother says she doesn't know what the poor thing will do, unless the neighbors chip in and help her. Let's cut some wood for her."

A groan went up from the Klan.

"You can't cut wood with robes on," said Harry.

"We can take them off, can't we, after it gets dark? That is what we did when we put Ezra Bowen's hay in the barn."

"You can't cut wood," objected Hank, "unless you have some to cut."

"That's so," said Bill. "She hasn't any wood but that is where the trouble comes in. We've got to get her some; that's all."

"How much money have we, Pedro — I mean Keeper of the Secret Records?" asked Benny.

"Sixty-five cents," I told him. "We want more than that for Mr. Norton's present. He is going away in three weeks."

"You can't do much of anything with sixty-five cents," said Bill. "It wouldn't buy much wood, anyhow. Maybe we can earn some more."

"Not with school almost ready to begin. How about it, Most High and Mighty Potentate?"

"It is up to the Keeper of the Secret Records," said Skinny. "That is what a secretary is for."

"It is not—" I began; then I thought of something.

"My folks," I told them, "have a wood-lot up on East mountain, in Savoy. Don't you remember? We cut a Christmas tree up there one year. That is where we get all of our wood. Maybe they will let us have three or four cords for Mrs. Clark. We can cut it up and it won't cost anything."

Another groan went up from the Klan, and I saw Harry feeling of his muscle and shaking his head.

Skinny looked around for his hatchet to swing and couldn't find it. Then he jumped to his feet and stood there, with his arms folded like a bandit and the peak of his hat sweeping the roof of the cave.

"All in favor of having Pedro's folks give old

Mrs. Clark four cords of wood for us to cut up, say aye."

"Aye," we all yelled, Bill Wilson making more noise than anybody.

" 'Tis well ! Let be what is."

Then Skinny stood there, paralyzed, for a gruff voice came in through the opening of the cave,

"Come on out of that, you fellows. One at a time. Come with your hands up."

"Great snakes ! " I heard Bill Wilson say, whispering to himself. "I wish I hadn't come."

We all looked at Skinny. He was swallowing hard, back of his mask, and wetting his lips with his tongue.

"Step lively ! " came the voice again. "If you are not all out here in sixty seconds, we'll begin shooting."

Bill and I started for the opening, with our hands up, but Skinny grabbed us before we had taken two steps.

"Take off those robes," he said, "and follow me. Quick ! "

Our cave, as you know, if you have read about the doings of the Band, has two ways to get in and out. The one which we always use when we hold

our meetings, because it is a lot easier, is at the edge of Peck's brook, where the water comes almost into the cave. We have to step carefully, when we have shoes and stockings on, to keep from getting our feet wet.

The other entrance is farther up the side of the ravine, back from the brook, where Tom Chapin fell in when he first discovered the cave. That upper entrance we keep covered with brush so that nobody can see it. There is a big hole, several feet deep, and near the bottom of that hole is an opening between some rocks, through which we can wriggle and finally get into the real cave part.

We crawled out that way once, when a cloud-burst had filled the cave with water and we had to get out or drown. That time we had to dive for the opening and crawl through under water. It was awful. Since then we have kept a rope hanging there, tied to the root of a tree, to make it easy to climb out if we have to.

I hadn't thought of that rope in a long time but I knew in a second what Skinny was going to do, when he tore off his robes and started for the inside opening. Suddenly he stopped and grabbed Benny; then pushed him in through the hole.

"Pedro, you go next and help him," he whispered. "Hurry ! "

There wasn't any time to talk about it, for we expected them to commence shooting into the cave every second. We were through in a jiffy. Benny didn't need any help. He caught hold of the rope and before I could boost him he had scrambled to the top and pushed away the brush. I was up almost as soon as he was. The other boys were close behind and following us up the side of the ravine, careful not to make any noise.

Skinny came last. He was almost to the top, and I thought we were going to get away, when he caught his toe on a root and fell. A shower of dirt and stones went rattling down, as he struggled to his feet; then a man, holding a gun, stepped around from behind the rock, under which our cave is, and saw him.

Skinny looked at the man and the man looked at Skinny.

"Hello, Mr. Michael," said he, with a grin. "It's you, is it ? Don't shoot. I'll come down."

"Well, I'll be gosh-swiggled ! " said the marshal, for that was who it was. We had thought it was robbers and it was only the marshal.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, after a moment.

"Holding a meeting in our cave. We thought you were a robber."

"It's that kid they call Skinny Miller," said the marshal, turning to some men who had come out from behind the rock. "The rest of the gang are not far away, you can be sure."

"How did you get out of the cave without our seeing you?"

"That is a secret," Skinny told him.

"Oh, it is, is it? Well, what were you doing in those robes and masks?"

"What robes and masks?" asked Skinny, pretending that he didn't know what the marshal was talking about.

"Now, don't play innocent; it won't go down. We saw you wearing them and we saw you crawl into the cave. What is the big idea? That is what I want to know, and you will give it to me straight, if you know when you are well off. What did you think you were doing, when you scared the girls?"

"It's all off, fellers," Skinny called to us. "Come on back. We've got to tell."

Then we told him about the B. H. K., and he was gosh-swiggled several times.

"Scaring those girls was not a good deed," he said, finally. "In fact, it was a mean one. You frightened them half to death. They came piling into my office like a flock of sheep. You have had us guessing for some time with this Klan business and when we found your card on the tree, in Plunkett's woods, we made up our minds to get you."

"We were only having a little fun with the girls," Skinny told him. "We didn't know they were there when we started. We were on our way to the cave to hold a meeting."

"Put on your robes again. Let us see how you look."

We crawled into the cave and in a minute came out again, with our things on.

"I don't blame the girls for being frightened," laughed the marshal, when he had looked us over. "I am almost scared myself."

"Say!" he exclaimed, suddenly. "You fellows must have been the devils in the cemetery. Is that right?"

Skinny grinned and hung his head.

"What in the world were you doing there at that

time of night ? Stealing chickens like Sam Cooper ? ”

Skinny looked at Bill and then at me, to see if we thought that he ought to tell.

I nodded my head. What was the use ? They would have found it out, anyhow.

“ It is a secret,” Skinny told him, “ but we might as well tell you. We had just finished getting in Ezra Bowen’s hay and were on our way home. We were just as scared as Sam was.”

“ Ezra Bowen’s hay ! ” he shouted. “ Did you boys put that hay in the barn ?

“ Well, I’ll be gosh-swiggled ! ” he said again, when we nodded our heads.

“ Say, boys ! ” he went on, as soon as he and the other men had finished laughing. “ You mean all right, anyhow. We’ll shake hands and call it quits. But don’t scare any more picnics, or you will get into trouble.”

CHAPTER XX

A LETTER FOR THE KLAN

EVERYBODY in town was talking about the B. H. K. and our good deeds, especially getting in Ezra Bowen's hay and the devils in the cemetery. We couldn't go out in the street, without being stopped by somebody and asked about it.

"Land sakes !" exclaimed Mrs. Barker. "You boys are the beatenist ! How did you ever think of such a thing ?"

"Read it in a book," Skinny told her.

I think that Dad knew about it all the time except at the very first but he never let on, and pretended to be as much surprised as anybody when the marshal found out who had been doing it all.

"It has been good work, John," said he, "an experience which you never will forget and which, I think, will leave a lasting mark on your character. Keep it up, my boy, as you go through life, — perhaps not the robes part but the helpfulness. Scatter sunshine and kindness as you go along."

"I now can understand," he went on, after a minute, "what has been something of a puzzle to me, why your mother was so generous with her doughnuts."

It made us feel good but something still bigger came a few days later, when I met Skinny at the postoffice, after supper one night, and the postmaster handed him a letter. His eyes stuck out like saucers when he was reading it. You almost could have hung your hat on them.

"Gee-whilikins ! Pedro," said he. "Read this."

Then before I could read it he snatched the letter away and put it in his pocket.

"No, not here," he added. "We must have a meetin'."

There wasn't time to wait for the Sign, so we hung around the postoffice, knowing that pretty soon every member of the Band would drop in.

"It is too late to go to the cave," Skinny told us, when all were there, "but we can get to Pedro's barn in two minutes. Come on."

"What are we, Skinny ?" asked Benny, after we had climbed the barn stairs and were standing around for a minute before getting busy. "Are we Scouts or Bandits or B. H. K.'s ?"

For answer Skinny went over to the chest, where we kept our things, took out his robes and put them on. Then the others made a jump for the chest and soon the eight of us were sitting around in a row — black masks, peaked hats and everything. The sight of all those masked figures, sitting there in the growing darkness, without moving or making a sound, gave me a queer feeling, and I guess everybody was feeling the same way.

The Most High and Mighty Potentate looked around for his hatchet and couldn't find it. Then he stepped to the hay mow, grabbed a pitchfork and stood there glaring at us, as if ready to pitch sinners into the fire, like the woman told my mother.

"The meetin' will come to order," he shouted, pounding the floor with the handle of the fork. "The Keeper of the Secret Records will call the roll."

"Cut it out, Skinny," I urged. "Never mind the roll; we want to hear the letter."

He made a quick lunge with the pitchfork and stood there, in his robes, pointing the tines at my heart.

"The roll !" he thundered.

Anyhow, that's the way he told me to put it down

in the minutes of the meeting but it didn't sound much like thunder to me. "Hissed" would be more like it, and I told him so.

"Everybody is here," I said, after each of the robed figures had answered to his name.

"Is there any business to come before the meetin'?"

Nobody said a word. If there was any business, we didn't know what it was.

"Maybe the Factor Factotum Inkibus has something to tell us?"

"School begins tomorrow," growled Bill, "and we'll have to cut out the good deeds. We finished chopping Mrs. Clark's wood today, anyhow. Pedro's father is going to send it over to her."

" 'Tis well. Anybody else got anything to say?"

"The letter! Skinny," I whispered. "The letter! It soon will be too dark to read it."

"Order!" he shouted, pounding the floor with the handle of the fork.

"The Keeper of the Secret Records will read the message."

He handed me the letter. I snatched it in a hurry and turned to the window to read, before he could change his mind. What I saw there almost took my

breath away. The letter was written to "The B. H. K., care of Mr. Gabriel (Skinny) Miller," and this is what it said:

"Members of the Mystic Klan:—

"We, the undersigned, having heard of your good deeds with pleasure and being desirous of showing our appreciation of them in something more substantial than words, do hereby pledge ourselves to provide a suitable club room for your meetings, furnish the same properly, and keep the table filled with reading matter and games.

"A meeting of citizens will be held in the town hall, next Saturday evening, to talk over plans for this club room, and each and every one of you is urged to be present. Come with or without your robes, as seems most befitting the dignity of your noble Order and the secrecy of your doings."

It was signed by nearly everybody in the village, it seemed to me. The boys all sat there speechless while I was reading and even for a moment after I had finished. Then Bill jerked off his mask and let out a yell.

"Great snakes!" he exclaimed, when he had come up for breath. "What do you know about that!"

That ended the meeting. We threw off our robes and all began talking at once.

"How about the cave?" asked Harry, finally. "Does it mean for us to give up our cave? If it does, I'm against it, every day in the week."

"And me," "And me," "That's right," said the others.

We all looked at Skinny, being patrol leader and Most High and Mighty Potentate, to hear what he had to say about it, but it was Benny who thought what to do.

"Guess what," said he. "Why not have the club room for the Boy Scouts, all the Boy Scouts in the village, not just our own patrol, and keep the cave for ourselves alone?"

"Don't leave out the Gingham Ground Gang," added someone. "They are outside the village. They need a club room more than we do because they haven't any cave."

"They are looking for one," Skinny told him, "up at the Raven Rocks. There ought to be a good one there somewhere."

That was the thing to do; we could see it in a minute. We decided to go to the meeting in our Scout uniforms, robes and masks being so hot.

“ Fine business ! ” said Mr. Norton, when we had told him about it. “ You can make that club room a big thing for the boys of the town. Your plan is splendid. Keep the Klan out of it. That is like your cave, just for yourselves alone. This should be a Boy Scout affair, and for our whole troop, as you say.

“ It will boost the Boy Scout movement in great shape and it will get the older people interested in it. That is what we need more than anything else.”

After all, it was kind of good to get back in school again, with Teacher and all the girls and boys around; to look over in the corner and see Bill scowling into his book and thinking he was studying hard, and Skinny, slipping over to the blackboard and drawing the Sign, when Teacher wasn't looking.

We talked it over with Mr. Norton, the night before the big meeting in the town hall. He had wanted to have one more campfire and asked to have it on Bob's Hill.

When I told Mother that we were going to have a goodbye campfire, she made a big pan of doughnuts for us to take up on the hill.

“ I have seen a lot of boys,” she said, “ all ages —

some of them so old that their hair had fallen out and maybe their teeth — and I never saw one yet who couldn't eat good doughnuts."

"Your doughnuts, Mrs. Smith, and your kindness and sympathy, have done more for these boys than I have been able to do, with all my trying," Mr. Norton told her, when we had met at our house.

"Go along with you," she said, shooing us out of the kitchen, but she smiled at him, just the same.

We went up through the orchard and climbed the hill, just after the sun had gone down behind Greylock. Mr. Norton stood there a long time, looking at the mountains and up and down the valley, as if he would like to carry them away with him.

"This business of making a living," he told us, when we had gathered around the fire, "sometimes takes us away from the scenes we love best. You boys, after a time, will scatter, most of you. One or two may stay here but not more, in all probability. And when you are far away and think back through the years, you will find, I am sure, that there will be a sort of halo around Bob's Hill. The people who will live here then will not be able to see and feel just what you will see and feel.

"Do you realize, boys, that, right here and now,

you are having the happiest time of your lives ? Later years will bring their own joys, great ones too, but along with those joys will come responsibilities, and sorrows perhaps, unless you should be more fortunate than most people."

"Guess what," said Benny, getting ready to run. "Skinny has sorrow now. Sadie won't speak to him, on account of his scaring the picnic."

"That is pretty tough, for a fact," laughed the scoutmaster, when things had quieted down again. "Maybe she will get over it, Skinny, after tomorrow night."

"Oh, I don't care," said he. "Girls are queer, anyhow. You never can tell what they will do."

"So young and so wise ! " exclaimed Mr. Norton.

"Now just a word about school," he went on. "It is not easy for a boy to realize that school is his big chance. Abraham Lincoln walked miles to get what little schooling he had, and he studied by the light of the fire."

"Look what he grew to be, without going to school much," Skinny told him, "President of the United States."

"That is true but there was something in Lincoln, which all boys do not have. It was the will to learn.

School can not give that to a boy; it is up to him. Because of that will to learn, the old district schools, such as your grandfathers used to attend, turned out some big men, and our modern colleges, because of the lack of the will to learn, turn out some pigmies.

“ You can learn outside of school. Lincoln did. And after you have left school and gone to work, you will find that you have only commenced to learn. But school makes it easier. I don't remember of having met a man, however successful, who did not wish he had made better use of his time in school, when he had a chance.

“ This is your chance, boys. If you do not learn now in school, you will have to do it later, or you never will get anywhere, and later you will find that the business of living will demand most of your time and attention.

“ Now is your chance, boys. More than ever before, it is necessary to have a trained mind. There are Bob's Hills and Greylocks to climb, in business, in life. Dig your heels in, fellows, and climb. Try it this year, if only because I ask you to.”

“ I don't see how we can get along without you,” Skinny told him, “ but, betcher life, we'll dig in our heels. Won't we, fellers ? ”

"We never can pay you for all you have done for us, Mr. Norton," I said.

"Yes, you can. You can dig in your heels and make me proud of you, for one thing. That would repay me for all I have tried to do. You can repay me in another way. In a few years, you boys will be as old as I am now. You will be surprised at how soon that time will come. There will be other boys coming along, just as you boys are coming along now. Give them a helping hand. Keep the good work going."

We sat talking around the glowing embers for a long time. The sky slowly darkened in the west, and across the valley a great ball of fire came up from behind Hoosac range. In the light of the full moon Greylock loomed big and black, and we could begin to see up and down the valley again.

"Before we leave," said Mr. Norton, after he had looked and looked, until we thought he never would stop, "I am going to ask Bill Wilson to give one of his justly-celebrated yells. I shall hear nothing like it out west, I am sure."

Bill straightened up and took a long breath; then began. I'll bet they heard him at the Gingham Ground. Before he had finished, Skinny pulled out

his Boy Scout hatchet and commenced an Indian dance, waving his tomahawk as he jumped high in the air, and singing a lot of Indian words.

We all followed and did the same, circling around Mr. Norton and yelling, "Hi ! Hi !," every time we passed in front of him, where we could see his face. The last time around, we stood still in a row and gave him the Scout salute.

There was a smile on his face, when we turned to go down the hill, but in his eyes I thought I could see something shining.

CHAPTER XXI

THE TRAIL'S END

WE never had been It at a meeting before, only in playing tag, and we didn't know how to act. We all met at Benny's, Saturday night, and marched down to the hall, wearing our Scout uniforms. There were a lot of folks in the hall and when they saw us they clapped their hands a little. They were thinking about Ezra Bowen's mortgage, I guess.

"Great snakes!" Bill whispered to me. "What is it all about, anyhow? We haven't done anything much, only have fun."

"Sh-h," I told him. "Put up a bluff, just the same. There is Mr. Norton on the platform. I wish he would come down and sit with us."

Skinny saw him at the same time. "Give him the Scout salute, fellers," he ordered.

We marched down in front, as big as life, and saluted. Of course, he stood up and saluted back. It surprised the folks some, I guess.

"Come right up here, boys," he said. "You are

expected to sit on the platform. You are It, tonight."

We didn't like to do it but had to, and there we sat with Mr. Norton and some of the biggest men in town, looking down into the smiling faces of the people we knew best and liked best.

Our own folks were there, not sitting in a bunch but scattered around the hall, just as they happened to come in, and a whole lot more. The marshal was right down in front. Jim Donovan waved at us from a back seat and with him were some Gingham Ground people, the committee who settled the strike.

After we had sat there a while, waiting for whatever was going to happen to begin and feeling kind of funny, up on the platform that way, with everybody looking at us, Skinny nudged Bill and motioned with his head, jerking it to one side. Bill looked; and there sat the mill owners! Some of them had their boys with them and those boys had on Scout uniforms.

But they were not the ones that Skinny meant and he jerked his head again, a little farther over. Bill looked once more, and so did I. I am not saying that they were the ones, because Skinny was

staring straight ahead, but there sat Sadie and Margy and some other girls ! We didn't have time to look around any more, for just then the postmaster stepped to the front of the platform and rapped on the table for order.

"Put it down in the minutes of the meetin', Pedro," whispered Skinny.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," began the postmaster, "we have met here tonight on a very pleasing occasion. During the summer our village has been startled more than once by reports of masked bandits having been seen on lonely highways. Once in particular, so we were informed, the devil himself was abroad, accompanied by a sort of furnace committee, all armed with pitchforks and looking for sinners."

When he said that, everybody laughed except us. We couldn't laugh, being up on the platform, but Skinny looked at me and winked.

"It turns out that those masked bandits and imps of Satan were just some of our own boys. They had formed themselves into a sort of secret society and went about in costume righting wrongs and doing good deeds. Some of us think that it would be a good thing to show our appreciation of what they have done, by providing a club room for the

boys. We called this meeting to talk over the matter and make plans.

"Furthermore, we asked those boys to come here tonight and let us know their wishes. They are here on the platform, not in their robes and masks but in the Boy Scout uniform, which we all have learned to honor.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, permit me to introduce the members of the mystic Klan, the B. H. K."

He stopped talking and looked at us.

"Stand up," whispered Mr. Norton. "Stand up."

We jumped to our feet, feeling very foolish, but a little proud, just the same.

While the people were clapping their hands, the postmaster asked something in a whisper of Mr. Norton and then went on.

"Friends, I think that I voice the wishes of all of you, when I say that we should like to hear from the leader of this Klan and learn from his own lips what the members think of our plan to provide a club room. I shall now ask the Most High and Mighty Potentate to address us."

Skinny looked paralyzed and began to wet his lips with his tongue. He didn't seem able to move except to motion to me to do something, being Keeper of the

Secret Records. I pretended not to see him, and Bill gave him a kick under the chair.

"They are just your own home folks and neighbors, Skinny," whispered Mr. Norton. "And — yes, I see Sadie over there, looking this way and waiting for you to begin. She will think you are a quitter. Brace up, and give 'em Bunker Hill."

Then Skinny gulped and, with a scared look on his face, struggled to his feet. There came such a clapping of hands that I could see him begin to brace up and even get a little chesty. Skinny is a good speaker, one of the best in our school. He has made talks to the Band a lot of times, but this was different.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," he began, just like the postmaster did. His voice was weak at first but grew louder as he went on. "Bill Wilson said, when we were coming into the hall, that he didn't know what this was all about, because we hadn't done anything except to have fun. That is the way the rest of us feel; but we thank you, just the same, for coming here and wanting to give us a club room.

"The club room is all right, only we don't want it just for ourselves. We'd like it for all the Boy Scouts in town, and that takes in the Gingham Ground."

He sat down and there was great clapping. I could see Sadie and Margy spitting their hands together like everything. People were looking at one another and nodding their heads. The Boy Scout club room was making a great hit.

"I can see by your faces," the postmaster began again, after the meeting had quieted down, "that you approve of the enlarged plan — a club room for Boy Scouts, for all the Scouts in our town. It is a splendid idea. Unless there is some objection, we shall consider that plan adopted.

"Now, as to ways and means. We already have raised a considerable sum, nearly enough to finance the project, I think, but somebody here, whom we have not seen, may wish to get in on this thing. We do not want to be selfish and keep all the fun for ourselves, any more than these boys do. We should like to hear from anybody who wishes to help the cause along."

There was a moment of quiet; then a stir over at one side, as a man made his way out to the aisle and to the front of the hall. He was the biggest owner of the gingham mill !

"Platform ! platform !" shouted the people, when he turned to speak.

He smiled and climbed the steps to the platform, where we all were sitting and wondering what was going to happen.

"Fellow Citizens," he began, "we mill owners want a larger part in this splendid movement, which these boys seem to have started. We are not sure what the mysterious letters, 'B. H. K.' stand for but we think they must mean, 'Brave and Happy Kids.' Anyhow, while the mill was closed recently, these brave and happy boys were busily engaged in making the kids at the Gingham Ground brave and happy.

"We have learned that it was through the Boy Scouts and their scoutmaster, Mr. Norton, that the regrettable strike was settled, and settled without violence. Through them, directly or indirectly, we mill owners learned that, without meaning to be, we had been unjust to our employes, in some ways. We have been able to straighten out those matters of injustice which led to the strike and to secure a spirit of cooperation and harmony, which we hope will endure.

"To make a long story short, here is what we want to do. We ourselves, the mill owners, want the privilege of building a suitable club house for the

Boy Scouts of this town, as a constant reminder to the people of the big thing for which Boy Scout-ism stands, and as a constant reminder to ourselves of our own obligations to the men and women who work in the mill.

“ We want, furthermore, — and this, I am frank enough to say, was suggested to us by Scoutmaster Norton but has been eagerly adopted by us — we want one large and comfortable room in that club house set apart for the use of our own employes at the gingham mill, more particularly for those mill workers who, having come recently from Europe, are not yet used to the ways of America. Let an instructor be employed to teach them our language and the ways of citizenship in their adopted country. The mill owners will build and donate such a club house and will join you in providing a fund for its maintenance. What do you say, friends? Will you do it? ”

There wasn't any need of taking a vote on that question. The whole room rang with cheers, and the Gingham Ground folks cheered louder than anybody. Then, louder than the cheering, came cries of

“ Norton ! ” “Norton ! ”

"Pedro," whispered Skinny, excitedly, "put this in the minutes of the meetin', and write it big."

"In the name of the Boy Scouts of our town," began Mr. Norton, "and I am certain that our Troop Committee will back me up in the matter, I gladly and proudly accept this generous offer. I believe that the whole town will benefit greatly, not alone these boys and the mill workers.

"The suggestion about the club room for mill employes was made because, it had seemed to me, we older Americans do not pay enough attention to the Americanization of our foreign-born brothers. They come over here, many of them, full of hope and enthusiasm, and ideals perhaps, but are ignorant of our language, our ways and of the larger meaning of America. We do little to correct this and then wonder sometimes when they go wrong.

"They are very much like boys, my friends, and the same doctrine which we teach to our Boy Scouts will be found equally good for them. Let me illustrate by referring briefly to the twelve points of Scout Law. Listen closely, and you will notice how well they are adapted to the Americanization of our foreign-born population:

" 'A Scout is trustworthy.' That is, dependable.

“ ‘A Scout is loyal.’ Loyal to country, to home, to employer.

“ ‘A Scout is helpful.’ That is what these boys have been living up to, with their good deeds.

“ ‘A Scout is a friend to all and a brother to every other Scout.’ Here we have the ideas of brotherhood and cooperation.

“ ‘A Scout is courteous.’ Lessons in courtesy are something needed by many native-born Americans.

“ ‘A Scout is kind, and a friend to animals.’ Good doctrine for us all.

“ ‘A Scout is obedient.’ Obedient to law, especially — a lesson for us all to learn. Citizens often forget that in a country like ours, where the people rule, disobedience to law is a blow at liberty.

“ ‘A Scout is cheerful.’ Grumbling and whining never get one anywhere.

“ ‘A Scout is thrifty.’ To become self-supporting is the first duty one owes his country. It is the habit of thrift and saving that makes great enterprises like the gingham mill possible.

“ ‘A Scout is brave.’ Brave not only in the presence of danger, but in the presence of wrong.

“ ‘A Scout is clean.’ Clean in body, in thought and in speech.

“ ‘A Scout is reverent.’ He is taught to love God and keep His commandments.

“ You can make the application as well as I can and I know you will agree with me that in these twelve points of Scout Law we have all the essentials of good citizenship.”

He stopped for a moment; then smiled at us and went on.

“ Just a few words more and I shall finish. These boys on the platform, whom we are honoring tonight, and the other boys here and at the Gingham Ground, are the most important people in town. We sometimes think that we are important, we older boys, who are running mills and stores and farms and making speeches, but we soon shall pass on. The future, my friends, rests with these youngsters. Keep close to them. To do so has been a joy and inspiration to me, and I shall miss them, while away, more than I care to think. Keep close to the boys, men. If possible make Scouts of them all. Every church and every school in town should have its Scout patrol, or troop, for the Boy Scout movement is the salvation of America.”

He stepped to the wall and pulled a cord. The American flag, the most beautiful flag in all the

world, unrolled and hung there, at one end of the platform. Skinny and the rest of us jumped to our feet and saluted. Down in the hall, here and there, stood a Boy Scout at salute. Then the whole crowd arose.

"The oath, fellers," said Skinny. And standing at salute before the flag, we repeated the Scout oath:

"On my honor I will do my best — to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law; to help other people at all times; to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight."

"Great snakes!" exclaimed Bill, on our way home from the meeting. "That club house will be a big thing, all right, but the cave for us — a part of the time, anyhow."

"Betcher life!" said Skinny. "We have spoken."

